

Preparations – Chapter 1 – The Guns

“It’s for you,” Sharon called.

“Hello,” Gary answered, picking up the phone.

“What are you up to,” Ron’s bass voice came over the phone.

“I haven’t been up that long partner, so just trying to wake up,” Gary replied. “What’s up?”

“Same old crap,” Ron laughed, “But I hadn’t talked to you in a month so I thought I’d better make sure you were still alive.”

“I’m too ugly to die,” Gary laughed.

“You are that,” Ron agreed.

“Be nice,” Gary warned. “You buy the membership to the shooting range yet?”

“Money’s kind of tight,” Ron explained.

“Oh, Kevin is still living there, huh?” Gary

“Yeah, you know how it goes,” Ron replied, dejectedly. “Want to run by the gun store and look at what they have in?”

“Give me an hour to clean up and I’ll go,” Gary suggested.

“See you at 10,” Ron answered, “Ciao.”

An hour later Ron pulled up in front of Gary and Sharon’s. Gary got in Ron’s car and Ron pulled out.

“Talked to Clarence lately?” Ron asked.

“Called him maybe 3 weeks ago, and got the machine,” Gary said, “He called back the next day. Said they had company from Alabama for a week.”

“How’s he doing?” Ron asked.

“His leg finally healed up,” Gary reported, “Said he was feeling ok. How’s Linda?”

“Same-o, same-o,” Ron laughed, “At our age nothing ever changes much.”

“We going to the gun store for anything in particular, or did you just want to get out of

the house?" Gary asked.

"Nothing special," Ron said, "Thought I'd pick up a couple of bricks of .22's and see what she got in."

"The last time we went you picked up a couple of bricks of 22's," Gary observed, "Have you been shooting a lot or are you stockpiling?"

"Mostly stockpiling," Ron answered, "You got off on that kick about writing survivalist fiction and I got to thinking that I ought to be a little better prepared."

"Did you ever finish reading that story I printed out for you?" Gary asked.

"I'm still working on it," Ron answered, "But it got me to thinking and I have made a lot of the preparations you suggested."

"Oh, like what?" Gary asked.

"I've been adding ammo a little at a time and picking up a few extra groceries every time we go to the store," Ron explained. "How are your preparations coming along?"

"Don't go there partner, that's a real can of worms," Gary cautioned.

"Ever get the battle rifle you wanted?" Ron asked.

"No. I've been thinking about it a lot though," Gary said, "As much as I want an M1A, I don't know if I'd be up to lugging it around if things went to hell and we had to defend ourselves. I've been thinking a lot about maybe getting a Mini-14, though. It isn't much of a cartridge, but hell, a rifle and ten mags only weight a fraction of what an M1A weighs with half as much ammo. I figured on buying a used rifle, they don't really wear out if they're well taken care of, but the only stores that have used Mini-14's want as much for a used one as they do for a new one."

"I think that's just a California problem Gar-Bear," Ron said, "We really have to give some serious thought to moving out of California."

"That's all I ever think about Ronald," Gary admitted, "But, Sharon doesn't want to move back to Iowa because of the weather and doesn't want to move anywhere that she can't have access to 50 fabric stores and a quilting circle. Besides, all 3 of her grandchildren are in Palmdale. I'd just like to get a doublewide somewhere out in the middle of the boonies where I didn't have to worry about mowing lawns or any of the BS."

"Then you have the problem of getting water and fuel and phone and electricity," Ron laughed.

"True, it would have to be somewhere that I could get DSL access," Gary smiled. "But

hell, we could put in solar panel or that thin-film roofing I always talk about in my stories and adapt the water heater for solar water heating. Should have started the whole process back in 1992 when I quit my job. Still had all of my guns back then, too; and a generator and radios.”

“We’re here,” Ron announced, “Let’s go in and see what she has.”

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This particular gun store was an interesting place. It seemed that someone was always in the store selling a gun and 3-4 people were there looking at it even before she bought it. Few used guns lasted more than a few days. On this particular day, a guy was trying to sell the store a tricked out Mini-14. It had a Butler Creek folding stock, aftermarket flashhider and he had several 30-round magazines. The storeowner was trying to explain to the guy that she couldn’t take the magazines, they were illegal in California, and that she’d have to replace the stock on the rifle before she could sell it. Those folding stocks were now illegal. The flashhider had to go, too. The best she could offer was \$250.00. Gary watched the process and the guy was about to give in and sell the store the rifle, sans magazines for the \$250.00.

Gary leaned over to the guy and said, “I’ll give you \$400.00 cash money plus \$10 apiece for the magazines.”

The man looked at Gary, sizing him up. “I’ve changed my mind,” he said to the storeowner and indicated with a nod of his head for Gary to join him in the parking lot.

“You on the up and up?” the man asked.

“Yes. You can ask inside,” Gary said, “I bought a handgun a while back, so they ran a background check on me, if that’s what you’re worried about. Where did you get the rifle?”

“I bought it in Lancaster from Jack First’s gun store,” the man said, “Some guy had just been in and sold off part of his gun collection.”

“How long ago was that?” Gary asked.

“Oh, maybe 1993,” the man said.

Gary was fairly certain of the man’s answer. There was something awfully familiar about the rifle and he’d sold both of his Mini-14’s to Jack First back in 1993. He’d picked up the stock and flashhider in Phoenix and what were the chances that someone would have tricked out a Mini-14 just the way he had.

“Well, is \$400 for the rifle and \$100 for the magazines enough?” Gary asked.

“Cash?” the man asked.

“If you want to follow me to the bank, yes,” Gary replied.

“You have a deal,” the man answered.

“Let me get Ron to drive me to the Wells Fargo branch on 10th St. east,” Gary said.
“You can follow us over.”

Twenty minutes later the rifle, 10 magazines and 3 M-16 canvas pouches were safely tucked away in Ron’s trunk and the man had the money in his pocket.

“Why did you buy that particular rifle?” Ron asked.

“Do you remember the tricked out Mini-14 I used to own?” Gary asked.

“Vaguely,” Ron replied.

“Well, I could be wrong,” Gary said, “But I suspect that’s my rifle.”

“Really?” Ron said, “What’s the chances of that happening?”

“A zillion to one,” Gary said, “But we’ll know as soon as we get the rifle back to the house and dismantle it. I scratched it one time by accident when I was cleaning it. The scratch is on the trigger housing group.”

The scratch was still there, but apparently the previous owner had tried to re-blue it. Gary had his assault rifle back in his possession. When Sharon saw the gun, she almost went through the roof. What the hell was Gary doing buying a rifle that was 3 ways illegal in California, she wanted to know. Gary pointed out that this was the very rifle he’d converted into a full-blown assault rifle 12 years before. From the look on Gary’s face, Sharon could see that she’d better drop the subject; she hadn’t seen that gleam in years.

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Gary scrounged around in the garage looking for the box with all of his gun stuff. He still had the cleaning kit and the adapter that allowed him to load the Mini-14 magazines from stripper clips somewhere. The garage was a disaster. He’d moved back home and before he could get all of his boxes unpacked, Amy and DeWayne had moved back in. He had been trying to get the garage cleaned for about 4 years now, but Amy and DeWayne refused to pick up their possessions. About 20 boxes later, Gary finally found the blue plastic box containing his gun supplies. As he went through the box, he realized that all he had to do was replace his guns; he already had most of the accessories.

First things first, however; Gary didn’t have any ammo for the rifle and it wasn’t much

good without ammo. He got on the phone and called all of the gun stores in the Antelope Valley, looking for the best case-price on 5.56x45 ammo. Why wasn't he surprised when it turned out to be the store where Ron bought all of his guns? She had several cases of the government 5.56x45mm surplus ammo and it was cheaper than Ammoman, even after tax. As far as Gary was concerned, it was 1 down and 3 to go. He still wanted a Remington 12-gauge with a 20" barrel and magazine extension, a .22 rifle and an M1911.

Big 5 Sporting Goods always seemed to have a shotgun on special, usually a Mossberg 500, a Winchester Defender or a Remington 870, all with magazine extensions. Gary didn't much care for the Mossberg and the Winchester was usually only \$10 less than the Remington, so he decided to watch the sales and buy the 870 the next time it went on sale. He almost got caught flatfooted; the next time the Remington's went on sale, he was between disability checks. He never knew when the checks would come in; it ranged from the 22nd of the month to the 28th. The sale ended the 26th and Gary was going to float a check if necessary to buy the gun. But in far off Washington, someone must have known Gary's plight, the money was in his account on the 26th. For reasons known only to God, he didn't buy the 870, and on the way home, he stopped by the gun store and had her order a case of the 15-pellet, 3" 00 buckshot and a Mossberg 590A1; 2 down and 2 to go.

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When it came to .22 rifles, Gary had a special place in his heart for the Winchester 9422. When he'd ordered the shotgun shells, she'd quoted him a price of \$400 for the 9422 Legacy model. Although he'd never owned the Legacy, he was particularly attracted to the rifle because of the longer barrel. "Soon," he told himself. The problem always seemed to be that 'Soon' never came. Unless he forced the issue, he never would have the .22 and he'd vowed to buy the .22 before he looked for a used M1911. So, the next month when his disability check came in, Gary got Ron to drive him to the gun store and he bought the 9422. They'd just have to eat a lot of chicken for the next month, he guessed, 3 down and 1 to go.

Two months later, the trust made an unusually large deposit in his Iowa account and Gary was off and running. He manipulated acquiring a Taurus PT1911 with 5 additional magazines to the two it came with. His arsenal was about complete. Now, he could start saving for the main battle rifle. At \$1,300 it cost one hell of a lot more than any of his other guns, but he wanted it just to round out his arsenal. The situation had gotten steadily worse in Iraq ever since they'd turned over power to the Iraqis. "One of these days," he told himself, "Those terrorists are going to hit this country again and we're going to be up crap creek without a paddle."

Preparations – Chapter 2 – Electricity

Ron and Linda invited Gary and Sharon and Clarence and Lucy over for a Labor Day barbeque. Ron wanted Gary and Clarence to see his gunroom. He'd acquired so many guns that he'd cleaned out the shed in his back yard, installed two gun safes and converted the 8'x12' shed into a gun room. Ron had been buying off and on and had more guns than Gary had ever owned at one time. At the moment, he had 26, which included 8 rifles and 18 handguns.

"Tell me something Ron," Gary asked, "Why so many guns? Why haven't you bought a generator or put in an alternative electrical source?"

"No reason," Ron replied, "I guess I just got in a rut. Why do you ask?"

"I've been checking on solar panels," Gary explained. "I found a company that makes a panel 16" wide by 18' long. I did some calculations and I can put 50 of the panels on my roof. They come on a framework about 16" wide, so I can mount them right over the shingles on the roof."

"How much would that system cost you?" Ron asked.

"A lot," Gary replied.

"That doesn't sound like such a hot deal," Clarence observed. "In the long run, do you save any money?"

"If I didn't have to finance the purchase, yes, a lot," Gary said, "But financing the purchase with a 6% home equity loan, the net cost is about \$162 a month. On the other hand, with enough batteries, I can store enough electricity to keep me going for quite a while."

"You're not counting in your air conditioner, right?" Ron asked.

"Wrong," Gary said, "Even with the air on, I'd be producing more electricity than I used most of the time."

"How much electricity would that system generate?" Clarence asked.

"That depends on how many panels I put in," Gary said. "I used their calculator and discovered that if I put panels on my roof, I could generate over 100% of my electrical needs."

"So, what are you going to do?" Clarence asked.

"Simple, I'm going to refinance the house and put in 50 300-watt panels," Gary explained. "I figure I'll die before the house is paid off and the mortgage insurance will end

up paying off the system. I can convert my shed to hold the batteries and run wires through that pipe under my sidewalk that goes from the shed to the breaker panel.”

“What about a generator?” Ron asked.

“Well, I don’t really think that I’ll need one, but I might put in a 15kw diesel generator anyway,” Gary explained. “That will give me 100-amps 100% of the time. Even if the sun quits shining for several days and Edison goes off line, I’ll have electricity.”

“I think you’re carrying this being prepared way too far,” Ron said.

“Have you read a newspaper lately or looked at CNN?” Gary asked. “Maybe I am, but there’s going to be a whole bunch of people camping out in my backyard if the Arabs strike the US and take out the infrastructure.”

“You’re nuts,” Ron laughed.

“Yeah, I am, and I’m only going to charge you \$20 a day for a camping spot,” Gary laughed, “Clarence, you can stay for free.”

“How did you want that steak?” Ron asked, “Raw?”

“Medium, thank you very much,” Gary laughed. “Tell you what, you can rent my generator for \$10 a day, that way I won’t have to put up with your insults.”

Later that night after everyone had gone home, Ron mentioned Gary’s electrical project to Linda. Maybe, he said, Gary had a good idea, but they were going to move to New Mexico to live with Robert in a couple of more years so he couldn’t see the wisdom of putting in electrical panels. On the other hand, a 15kw generator was about \$3,000 and that would give them backup in case the lights went out.

Onan had a 15kw natural gas or LP vapor unit that had a built in transfer switch and was small enough to sit right next to their pool filter. The unit used a little over 1.2-2.5 gallons of propane an hour, if they had to switch to propane, so a 500 gallon propane tank, filled to 90% capacity would give them over 8 days of continuous electricity under the worst of conditions.

Linda told Ron to go ahead and put in the generator, they could always take it with them when they moved to New Mexico and if something did happen, she didn’t want to have to depend upon Gary and Sharon.

Gary hadn’t broached the subject with Sharon, he figured she’d have puppies if he talked about upping the home loan that much to put in the solar panels. But, having practiced his speech on Ron, he decided that now was as good a time as any.

“I was telling Ron that I’d like to put in solar panels to generate electricity,” Gary said.

“What did he say?” Sharon asked.

“Said I was nuts,” Gary admitted.

“How much would it cost and how would we finance it?” Sharon asked.

“Uh,” Gary started out.

“That much huh?” Sharon knew Gary and his hemming and hawing.

“But, we’ll break even in 21 years,” Gary said.

“Why not just a standby generator?” Sharon asked.

“I didn’t think you’d go for it,” Gary said.

“Pretend I might for a minute,” Sharon said, “What would you put in?”

“Well,” Gary said, “I’ve been looking at Generac and Onan. I sort of like the 15kw Residential Onan unit. We could set it on the patio by the natural gas outlet and put an LP tank nearby.”

“Why that unit?” Sharon asked.

“It’s rated at 15kw continuous and standby,” Gary said. “That’s 100-amps given our altitude and the sometimes high temperatures, the same as our electrical service.”

“Why not a diesel generator?” Sharon asked.

“No reason really,” Gary said.

“It smells, too,” Sharon said. “If you think we absolutely must have power, get the natural gas/LP vapor powered generator. But, I agree with Ron, you’re nuts.”

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Gary called Ron the next day and said he needed a favor. Could Ron run him up to Lancaster?

“What do you need to go to Lancaster for?” Ron asked.

“I want to go to the Onan dealer,” Gary explained.

“What for?” Ron asked, “I thought you were going to put in that solar system.”

“Sharon nixed the idea,” Gary replied, “She decided that we need to put in a 15kw residential generator.”

“Diesel?” Ron asked.

“No. Natural gas and LP vapor,” Gary said. “We can set it on the patio where I used to have the gas grill and hook up to the natural gas right there.”

“What about that diesel generator you were talking about?” Ron asked.

“Sharon can’t stand the smell of diesel fuel,” Gary replied.

“Do you know where the dealer is located?” Ron asked.

“I can look it up on the net and print a map,” Gary offered.

“Being you asked so nice, I’ll pick you up in an hour,” Ron said. “Ciao.”

The dealer said the price of the unit was \$3,087 plus tax, FOB his store.

“How much will we save if we buy 2?” Ron asked.

“Nothing,” the salesman replied, “But, if you buy 2, I’ll throw in the delivery.”

“Well then, make it 2,” Ron said.

“What’s up Ronald?” Gary asked, “I thought you weren’t into this preparedness thing.”

“I can’t see putting in solar panels,” Ron replied, “But Lyn and I talked it over and we’re going to put in a 15kw unit. Now, do you have any ideas on backup propane, or should I use my contacts at AmeriGas to get us each a tank?”

“You’re way ahead of me on that one Chief,” Gary said, “How much is a tank going to cost us?”

“Well, it depends on the shape, believe it or not, but in the neighborhood of \$1,350 for a 500 gallon tank,” Ron said.

“How long will that last?” Gary asked.

“At full load, the generator uses 2.4 gallons of propane per hour,” Ron said. “You should only put 450 gallons in the tanks, so say about 207 hours at full load. But, you won’t run full load all of the time, so depending on the season, anywhere from 8 days to 2 weeks.”

“That isn’t very long,” Gary said.

“True, but if you don’t run it 24/7,” Ron explained, “You’ll get a month or more electricity.”

“Maybe I should put in a 1,000-gallon tank,” Gary said.

“No, if you want 1,000-gallons, put in more 500 gallon tanks,” Ron said, “I checked the prices; you can put in 3 500-gallon tanks for less than the cost of a single 1,000-gallon tank.”

“Where are we going to get the tanks?” Gary asked.

“From Hanson Tank in LA, via AmeriGas,” Ron answered, “They only sell to licensed propane professionals and I don’t have a license anymore. You realize that you may not be able to put in 3 tanks in your backyard, don’t you?”

“Why not, it’s my backyard,” Gary said.

“Yeah, partner, but we live in the city and there are a ton of distance restrictions,” Ron explained. “We might be better off to just rent the tanks from AmeriGas. Look, since I’m going to rent my tank anyway, let me be the guinea pig. You can decide after I get mine installed. In the meantime, you can run your system off those 2 5-gallon bottles you have for your grill.”

The only thing Gary could find on the Internet was some vague references to distances from buildings and property lines. California seemed to exempt a single tank from inspection, if he read it right. Used tanks for sale on the net seemed to run in two sizes, too big and too small. He calculated that 30 days times 24 hours times 2.4 gallons per hour and he’d need 1,800 gallons of propane for 30 days for the generator, at full power. And, according to one website, he could run his whole house on 200 gallons of propane for the entire winter. He said screw it and bought a used recertified 2,200-gallon tank. Then, he bought a new set of jets for his furnace, dryer, stove and hot water heater. He figured that his neighbor Dick could help him change the jets in a pinch; Dick did work for Southern California Gas Company after all.

Buying the generator and tank put Gary and Sharon in a terrible bind until the next income came in on his trust fund, but they managed. Every extra bit of money they squeezed out each month went for propane to fill the tank. At least the crap hadn’t hit the fan, yet. Maybe he’d be ready before the Arabs, and maybe not, but it wouldn’t be for the lack of trying. Ron and Linda rented a 500-gallon tank from AmeriGas, but they weren’t planning on running their generator full time. Only time would tell who made the better decision. Gary had guns and ammo, electricity and gas. All he needed now was the M1A, food and water, first aid equipment and extra drugs plus a whole lot of luck.

Preparations – Chapter 3 – Food and Water

It was going to take a while to get even and a little money ahead, so Gary had plenty of time to shop for the food. He consulted Sharon and discussed whether to get the bulk foods from Walton Feed or the Mountain House prepared meals from Nitro-pak. She thought about it and decided that for 2 people, the Mountain House meals might be less wasteful. That figured, it ran an average of \$3.65 per meal for the Ultimate-Pak and \$2.65 per meal for the Platinum Reserve. Gary had eaten his share of freeze-dried food and it wasn't all that appetizing to him. The stuff was expensive, too; a 6-month supply for 2 ran \$2,700 for the Platinum Reserve and \$3,700 for the Ultimate-Pak.

Walton Feed had a 1-year Deluxe unit for one for only \$945. But, you had to have a grain grinder and a lot of extras that weren't included. Maybe a compromise was in order. He could get one of the Ultimate-Paks and a 1-year Walton Feed Deluxe unit. It all depended on how the money came in which he bought first. It made more sense to him buy the fancy foods first, and buy the less expensive foods second, but he'd just have to see.

Another place called Survival Unlimited had the same foods as Nitro-pak for a lot less money. Apparently, it paid to shop around some. That \$2,700 package ran \$2,300 and the \$3,700 package just \$3,154. Gary figured that there must be one hell of a markup on the food. He decided to order the 4-meal sample pak to see if this was food they would be able to eat for 6 months on a steady diet. It was a lot easier to throw away \$13.00 worth of food than several thousand dollars worth. Maybe he should try the AlpineAire foods too; they seemed to be a little more expensive than the Mountain House brand.

As far as water went, they used to keep 30 5-gallon bottles of Arrowhead drinking water in the garage, but gave that up when Gary's father made a stink about using a reverse osmosis filter instead. Neither solution satisfied Gary, the Arrowhead water was just too expensive and using the reverse osmosis unit didn't give him any backup. He looked on the net for water tanks and found that American Tank Company's 2,500-gallon poly water tank had the lowest cost per gallon at 38 cents per gallon. That still wasn't a lot of water, but if he replaced his 3-gallons-per-flush toilets with the 1.6-gallons-per-flush toilets, it would really increase his water supply. Of course, if the water went out, he'd have no water pressure so he called his buddy Fleataxi and asked him what to do about that. Fleataxi told him to get an RV water pump; it was as simple as that.

"Maybe I'm overreacting," Gary thought one evening when the prospects of getting prepared began to overwhelm him. One look at CNN on the web took care of his concerns in a big hurry. Fleataxi's TEOTWAWKI II might just be right; it sure as hell looked like the end of the world was just around the corner. When the US turned power over to the Iraqi interim government, unannounced, nothing really changed. The insurgents clearly had a different agenda than getting control of their country back. They wanted all of the foreigners out and, most likely, a Muslim state like Iran. But Bush had managed to get NATO's support, more or less, and nothing really changed.

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The sample meals came and they gave them a try. This stuff was gourmet fare according to the ads on the websites, but Gary didn't think any gourmet would eat the stuff, even if he, or she, were starving to death. Still, beans and rice could get old quick. And in the middle of Palmdale, the only wild animals to hunt were the occasional stray dog or cat. Sharon didn't see a dime's worth of difference between the Mountain House samples and the AlpineAire samples, so Gary figured he'd better save the few dollars and get the Mountain House food, when they had the money.

This living from hand to mouth crap was getting old, too. But, how else were they going to get prepared for whatever was coming on what amounted to a fixed income? That forced the decision for Gary as far as the food went; like it or not, he started with the Walton Feed package. When he finally made the purchase and it arrived, he stood looking at the 9 pails and 13 boxes. This pile of food was supposed to feed 1 person for a full year? He still had to go to Costco and buy oil and sugar, too. Then he had to buy that grain mill or the pails of wheat wouldn't do them a bit of good.

He'd bought one new toilet at Home Depot and got a friend to help him install it. He figured he was ahead of the game because he'd thought to buy a new wax seal for the stool, but the water line was too short and he had to go back to Home Depot a second time. The second toilet would just have to wait until he had the water situation resolved and the rest of the food laid in. And, where there's a toilet, there's toilet paper (hopefully). He had Sharon buying 2 of the 30-double roll packages of Charmin once a month on her trip to Costco for the past several months.

The plastic water tank fit on the front patio easily, making connection to the city water a no-brainer. But, it sure made the house look ugly. Gary pulled out the white picket fence and replaced it with lathe lattice and painted it white. His neighbors were already giving him strange looks over the LP tank that they'd had to use a crane to lift over the house into the backyard. The tank had ended up sitting right in the middle of the lawn to conform to all of the setback distances required. To get the gas from the tank to the generator had been a challenge, too. They'd cut a square hole in the slab next to the where the generator sat and forced a black iron pipe under the 15' of slab and plumbed it to the tank. The only way AmeriGas's fill truck hose would reach was if the driver pulled the truck into the drive. Gary and Sharon weren't making great strides on getting that propane tank filled either, but at 100 and 200-gallons a month, they were getting ahead of the curve, albeit slowly.

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"Hello?" Linda answered the phone.

"Hi Linda, Gary, is Ron free to come to the phone?" Gary asked.

“I’ll get him,” she replied.

“What’s up?” Ron asked when he came on the phone.

“I was wondering how you were doing building up your food supplies,” Gary asked.

“We’re trying Gar-Bear, but Kevin eats like a horse,” Ron replied.

“Did you ever give any thought to buying some of those freeze dried foods?” Gary asked.

“They taste like crap and cost more than steak,” Ron laughed.

“I got some sample meals for AlpineAire and Mountain House,” Gary said. “They’re tolerable, I guess. But you’re right, they sure are expensive; so, I bought the one-year food deal from Walton Feed. You have to grind the wheat, but it’s a lot cheaper, even after you buy a grain mill.”

“Did you buy any of the freeze dried stuff yet?” Ron asked.

“Not hardly,” Gary admitted, “I’d have to float a bank loan. Anyway, the reason I called was to tell you that we got the water tank in.”

“What water tank?” Ron asked.

“That’s right, I guess I didn’t tell you,” Gary said. “I put a 2,500-gallon plastic water tank on the front patio.”

“I’ll bet your neighbors love that,” Ron laughed.

“Took down the picket fence and replaced it with lattice,” Gary explained. “It’s not all that noticeable from the street now.”

“I’ll be over to look at it, give me a few minutes,” Ron replied.

A while later...

“Well, you can still see the tank from the street Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “It’s a shame you can’t plant some ivy or something and have it grow up the lattice.”

“You know, I’ve been thinking about that,” Gary said, “What would you think of my putting in some plastic ivy?”

“Sounds like a lot of work to me,” Ron shook his head.

“But, like you say, you can still see the tank from the street,” Gary replied.

“Your neighbors would still know you have the tank,” Ron continued.

“True, but that’s one of the things I like about California,” Gary said, “Nobody really neighbors much and with the turnover in this tract, in a couple of years, no one will even remember the tank.”

“Maybe,” Ron replied.

“Say, can Linda and you come over for a barbeque on Sunday?” Gary asked. “I’m going to invite Clarence and Lucy, too.”

“Steaks?” Ron asked.

“Hamburgers and hot dogs,” Gary laughed, “We won’t be eating any steaks until the preparations are done.”

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When he got home, Ron brought up Gary’s new water tank to Linda. Their water turnoff valve was in the back yard, so he wouldn’t have to hide a water tank. What did she think, should they put in a water tank? They were plastic, he pointed out, and they could move it to New Mexico, too. Linda checked her checkbook and told him to go ahead, but he’d have to do the plumbing himself. Ron didn’t mention the RV water pump; it was inexpensive enough he could sneak that through on the credit card.

“Clarence, how have you been?” Gary asked.

“Getting by Gary, how are you?” Clarence answered.

“Been real busy since Labor Day getting our preparations around,” Gary said.

“Did you put in those solar panels?” Clarence asked.

“No. Had to settle for a generator,” Gary answered. “Anyway, the reason I called was to invite Lucy and you to a barbeque on Sunday. Can you make it?”

“Sure, what time,” Clarence responded.

“Make it around 2,” Gary said.

“See you then,” Clarence said and hung up.

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“Are they coming?” Sharon asked.

“Yes, around 2 on Sunday,” Gary replied. “Say, if I wanted to buy a bunch of fake Ivy, where would I look?”

“Michael’s in Lancaster, why?” Sharon asked.

“You can still see the water tank from the street,” Gary said, “I thought maybe we could weave in some plastic ivy to hide it.”

Sharon NEVER passed up an opportunity to go shopping. She asked if there was anything else he needed while she was out and when he said no, left for Lancaster. It should have taken an hour or two tops, but Sharon was gone 5. She came home with a fake climbing rose, ivy and all sorts of plastic flowers. At least Gary had something to keep him busy for the rest of the week.

Gary had all of the plants up by Friday, but they looked artificial. He decided it was because they all ended at the sidewalk, so he dug out an old flower box, stuck the ends of the plants into the box and filled it with potting soil. That solved the problem, so he dug the other flower boxes out of the shed and ‘planted’ all of the plastic flowers. By the time he was done with the project, everything looked right.

They had water now and some food. The only important things they were missing were their prescription drugs. Gary had started refilling his insulin prescription ahead of time from when he’d started on insulin. At the moment, he was 6 bottles, 3 months, ahead of the curve. There were only 2 prescription drugs that he didn’t normally have a 4½ - month supply of, a diabetes pill and his anti-depressant. He could live without the anti-depressant, but the diabetes pill was necessary and expensive. Sharon took as many prescriptions as he did, but was never into saving up extra drugs. He guessed they would have to bite the bullet and get the doctor to write prescriptions for 90-day supplies of the drugs they were short of. After that, he could buy some first aid supplies and then return to buying food.

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Gary, Ron and Clarence were sitting on the back patio drinking iced tea and visiting on Sunday afternoon.

“I didn’t think those plastic plants could be made to look so real,” Ron said.

“They didn’t until I ‘planted’ them,” Gary said. “I guess it’s a good thing we never throw anything away.”

“You’re turning this place into a fortress,” Clarence observed.

“I still have to buy more food, put in another toilet and fill those prescriptions,” Gary said, “This getting prepared crap is expensive.”

Preparations – Chapter 4 – Finishing Up

“You lost me on the turn,” Clarence said, “What’s this about toilets?”

“My original toilets took 3-gallons of water per flush,” Gary explained. “I’ve replaced one of them with the new toilets that only take 1.6-gallons of water per flush. I still have to replace the other one.”

“I already had the newer toilets,” Ron said, “So I didn’t have to replace mine. It’s a good thing, too. Our house has a lot more toilets.”

“Did you put in a generator and water tank, too?” Clarence asked Ron.

“Got the generator, but we only have a 500-gallon propane tank Clarence,” Ron said. “Lyn and I talked it over and we’re going to put in a water tank in the back yard.”

“Then you’re not moving to New Mexico?” Gary asked.

“We’re moving, but we can take everything with us, partner.” Ron replied. “Besides, that won’t be for a while.”

“Did you ever get yourself a M1A rifle, Gary?” Clarence asked.

“Nope, but when I do, you’ll know I’m ready,” Gary said. “For what an M1A, magazines and ammo would cost, I can put in a 6-month supply of food for the 2 of us. So, I’ll just have to settle for the guns I have at the moment.”

“I suppose Lucy and I should put up some extra food,” Clarence commented. “We can’t afford all of the preparations you guys are making, but I suppose if we brought our own food, one of you might put us up.”

“Clarence, start with your drugs and then buy food,” Gary suggested. “After that, you ought to buy a rifle of some kind and maybe a 20” barrel for your 12-gauge.”

“Maybe a rifle,” Clarence conceded, “But I have a hacksaw and file so I won’t need the extra barrel for the shotgun.”

“But Clarence, that would be illegal,” Ron kidded.

“Yeah, well if it gets to the point that I have to cut off the barrel on my shotgun,” Clarence retorted, “Johnny Law can kiss my butt.”

“Maybe Clarence and Lucy had better stay with Linda and you, Ron,” Gary laughed, “I don’t want any militant black folks living with me.”

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Derek had survived Kosovo and was back home in Iowa hoping that George W. didn't decide to send his unit to Iraq next. Kosovo had been tough enough, but at least no one had shot at him. He'd had to dodge a few Molotov Cocktails and had to pull down on a couple of people, but other than that, his 6-month tour was uneventful. While in Kosovo, he'd completed BNCOC and was slated for a promotion and his own tank, finally. The state of Iowa had bought them Abrams tanks, but was too cheap to buy anything but the beat-up and worn-out M1A1's. His unit had been slowly refitting the tanks while he was in Kosovo, but as far as he knew, there were no plans to upgrade the M1A1's to M1A2's, let alone the M1A2SEP.

"Derek, if I sent you the money," Gary asked on the phone, "Would you be willing to buy me an M1A and some magazines?"

"You can buy the M1A in California," Derek replied, "Why would you want me to buy it?"

"California legal means it doesn't have the standard flashhider," Gary said, "And you'd have to buy me the magazines anyway."

"How about I just buy you the flashhider and magazines?" Derek asked. "The Army sort of keeps track of what guns we buy."

"Well, if you do that, you'll have to buy me the alignment tool and everything," Gary observed.

"Yeah, but then you can convert as many guns as you want to standard configuration," Derek replied.

"Fair enough, but buy me the flashhiders with the bayonet lug, would you?" Gary said.

"If the state of California catches up with you, you're going to jail," Derek responded.

"Do you remember that tricked out Mini-14 I had at one time?" Gary asked.

"Yeah, it's a good thing you don't have it anymore," Derek said, "It even violates federal law."

"I bought it back," Gary said, "Still in the configuration it was in when I sold it."

"When are visiting hours?" Derek laughed.

"I'll send you the money for a flashhider, the alignment tools and 9 magazines," Gary said, "That way, when I can afford the rifle, I'll have all of the parts."

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It was getting to be problematic in Gary's mind whether or not he'd finish his preparations in time. The news didn't look all that good and he still had a lot to get done. Fortunately the trust fund made a healthy year-end distribution and he was able to get the prescriptions filled and put in the second toilet. He considered his options and decided to buy the M1A and more food from Walton Feed. He could either have the rifle and beans or the fancy food; he opted for the former. Darn, that rifle was heavy, though; maybe he should make Sharon carry the M1A and 8 mags and he'd take the Mini-14.

At the barbeque, the three men had discussed possible terrorist strikes. Gary thought that the pipeline system was the logical target. There were over 200,000 miles of crude and refined petroleum product pipeline in the US. The government must have thought so too because they had taken the maps of the refinery and pipeline locations off their website in 2002. The US consumed something like 700 million gallons of fuel a day. It wouldn't take too many carefully placed explosives to bring the country to its knees, especially during the winter months when the demands for natural gas and fuel oil were high. Clarence and Ron seemed to think that the terrorists had some of those supposedly missing Russian nukes and they would try to sneak some into the country.

"I'll tell you two something," Gary had said, "Even as porous as our borders are it would probably still be tough to get a nuke into the country. On the other hand, dynamite is easy to steal and detonators and such aren't all that hard to come by. Hell, in some states you can walk in off the street, present a driver's license and buy the explosives. Why would the ragheads want to risk getting caught with a nuke when there are so many easier ways to screw up the country? Dynamite a few pipelines and some electrical substations and you'd screw us up good. Do it in winter and a lot of people would be in trouble."

"I don't know Gary," Clarence said, "Customs only inspects about 2% of the cargo passing through our ports. It wouldn't be all that hard to sneak in a nuke. There must be hundreds of sleepers living in this country. What if they did everything all at once? I mean can you imagine what it would be like if our fuel supplies were interrupted, the electricity went down and 3 or 4 major cities got nuked? It would almost bring down the government."

"I hadn't thought of it that way guys," Ron said, "I guess I'm glad Lyn and I made some preparations."

"You need a bigger propane tank Ronald and some food," Gary observed. "Clarence, you're way behind the curve on this one, you better get busy making preparations. You can drag your butt over here as long as I don't have to eat greens and chitterlings."

"You're a racist," Clarence laughed.

"Only since I found out what chitterlings were," Gary laughed back.

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Gary deemed himself as prepared as he was going to get. Maybe if some more money came in, he could spring for the Mountain House foods, but they could get by with what they had. He'd solved the problem with the garage. When Amy refused to pick up her things, he'd started throwing them away. There would have been room to park the car in the garage if it hadn't been so filled with emergency supplies. And to tell the truth, he wasn't as nearly concerned over the terrorists; it was his neighbors who bothered him. Most of them were ill prepared to deal with a real problem in the country. In the week between Christmas and New Year's when they'd gone to Costco, he bought 300# of pinto beans and 300# of rice. Sharon had a fit, but Gary pointed out that when their neighbors came looking for food, they could give them beans and rice and wouldn't have to share their other rations. Sharon thought about it a minute and made Gary buy 400# of flour and 100# of sugar.

Gary had bought first aid supplies from Nitro-pak. His purchases included the EMT Medic Rescue Pak, the Deluxe Suture and Syringe Kit, several kit refills and extra sutures. He'd also loaded up on MagLites and batteries at Costco. He wasn't expecting to have to fight World War III in his front yard, so he limited his ammunition purchases to 2 cases per weapon, except for the .22LR. He had 10 bricks of those; they might end up being currency. He didn't particularly worry about gasoline, he kept the car's tank full and had 8 5-gallon cans of stabilized unleaded. If they did have to bug out, they could go a long ways on 40 gallons of gas.

Now all they had to do was keep the supplies filled in as they used them. There was maybe one exception to that; Gary wanted enough tp on hand for a year. It's funny what became important to a person when they got older. Good old diabetic Gary wanted 4 things above all and three of them weren't even good for him. They were coke, candy bars, cigarettes and tp. Cigarettes had been tough to stockpile. At \$30 a carton at Costco, it was easy to spend lots of money quick when you got to the cigarette section. Gary solved that one by buying 6 cartons a month. When he wasn't sitting at his computer writing another of those yarns of his, he smoked about a pack a day. However, when he was engrossed in a story, they burned up in the ashtray and he easily went through 2 packs or more a day. He hadn't realized what an expensive habit writing fiction was.

Gary probably would have had his M1A a whole lot sooner if Missy hadn't gotten sick. She had pancreatitis and thyroid problems and God knew what else. And, of course, when your pet got sick you just had to rush them to the vet. At least you did when she was a \$500 purebred. No wonder they never got ahead, they kept seeing things on TV that they just 'had to have' and when they got more than \$300 in the bank the dog or one of the cats got sick. It was worse than having children. Or, maybe, it was just like having children. (Ron agrees completely.)

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Most books and manuals on preparedness advise a person to have some cash on hand to get them through the tough spots. Between his two checking accounts, Gary had

maybe \$100. It was a great idea if you could do it, but wasn't as if Gary planned to run to Albertson's or Costco if TSHTF. He contented himself to watching TV, especially the news. He wanted to know when the balloon went up. Ron called and said he'd ordered some food from Walton Feed, enough for 4 people for 6 months. Then Clarence called and asked Gary how much room he had in his freezer for the chitterlings.

At least that meant that if something happened, they'd all be ready to some extent. Ron told Gary that he had AmeriGas install a second 500-gallon propane tank, and that rather than rent, he had purchased the tank he had and the additional used tank. Gary was a little concerned about Ron's state of preparedness because Ronald was a cheapskate when it came to ammo. It was too expensive, Ron complained and Gary told him that if he bought sensible calibers instead of those exotic things like .38-40 that it wouldn't cost him an arm and a leg for 50 rounds. What was Ron going to do when the crap hit the fan anyway? Maybe he should consider getting something a little more common like a .45 Colt.

Gary hadn't been able to buy a Colt SAA or a Winchester in matching caliber, they just cost too much and he had enough guns anyway. Well, if nothing happened, he'd have money for the guns come summer, but somehow, he had a sinking feeling that he wasn't about to ever see those guns. On the days when nobody was raising hell in Iraq, it seemed that the Israelis attacked the Palestinians or the other way around.

He'd like just one night where the media wasn't talking about attacks or the Michael Jackson trial or the hung jury in the Laci Peterson murder trial. It wasn't surprising that the jury had hung, between ABC, CBS, NBC, CNN, FOX and MSNBC, there were at least 7 different explanations about what really happened and whether Scott had done it or not. How the hell could anyone get a fair trial anymore with the media pouncing on the cases? And, who really gave a crap whether Martha did it or not? She'd lost her empire, did it really matter if she went to jail for a few months?

Gary was so convinced that the terrorists were going to strike the pipelines that he spent hours on the net trying to get maps of where all the pipelines were. He did find out that California only produced 15% of the natural gas it used and the remaining 85% was supplied by pipeline from as far away as Canada. He also found out that the Office of the State Fire Marshal (SFM) regulated the safety of approximately 5,500 miles of intra-state hazardous liquid transportation pipelines and acted as an agent of the Federal Office of Pipeline Safety concerning the inspection of more than 2,000 miles of interstate pipelines. But, the harder he looked, the less he learned; the feds had clamped down on pipeline information very tightly. He was certain of one thing. Based on one map he'd run across, terrorists could knock out that 85% of the natural gas infrastructure with only 4 bombs and that would cut off fuel to one-tenth of the nation's population. And, if Clarence were right, it would be a whole lot worse if an attack were nationwide and included nukes.

Preparations – Chapter 5 – Happy Valentine’s Day

Sharon’s birthday is February 12th. That made Valentine’s Day a pretty pricey proposition. Back when they’d been married the first time, Gary sometimes cheated a little and rolled her birthday, Valentine’s and their anniversary into one large gift. Any more, he had to tone it back a bit because February to October was too long of a stretch. The trust came though handsomely in February and Gary headed for the gun store. They had a Winchester in .45 Colt and a Ruger Vaquero in .45 Colt in stock. They didn’t have any western rigs, but they had a cartridge belt in his waist size with .45 cal loops and a holster that would work. He filled out the forms and plunked down the money. Then he got Sharon to take him to the Mall and asked her to please pick out her own presents. He told her that it might not be so romantic, but he just wanted her to have something she really wanted and not to have to exchange it. Besides, he pointed out, he didn’t drive and if she wanted her presents, they’d better do it now.

Seeing how Gary had just dropped a grand at the gun store, Sharon led Gary over to Bolts in a Bathtub.

“There you go dear,” Sharon said, “That’s what I really want for my birthday and Valentine’s day.”

“What is that besides \$1,300?” Gary asked.

“It’s a cutting table,” she smiled, “I told you about it.”

What could he say? How about, ‘how much is that with tax?’ or ‘do you deliver?’ The next time he wanted to buy a gun or two, Gary figured he’d be better off having Ron drive him. He sort of got even; he’d forgotten to buy ammo for his new guns. At \$16.50 a box and 10 boxes to the case, the 2 cases of .45 Colt ammo about evened things up. They told him that he could pick up his rifle on the 14th and the revolver on the 19th. Gary positively hated the waiting periods. And why was the waiting period for a handgun 5 days longer than for a long gun? Maybe a handgun could kill you deader?

In the meantime, they had to rearrange Sharon’s sewing room to make space for the new cutting table. Gary decided to move the old table to the garage and stand it over some boxes. Then, he stacked boxes on top of the table, overall losing very little space. The garage looked like it had before he’d thrown Amy’s stuff in the trash, except that everything was neatly arranged. Ron had commented how nice it was to walk in a straight line in the garage. Gary huffed that there would be a lot more room if he threw away Sharon’s 50 cases of romance novels.

o

Ron and Linda came over for cake and ice cream on Sharon’s birthday. After they had their cake, Gary took Ron to the office for a smoke. Gary brought up CNN and pointed to the headlines.

"I don't like the looks of that one bit Ron," Gary said, "All hell is breaking loose in the Middle East."

"Are they going to send Derek over there?" Ron asked.

"He's not sure," Gary replied, "But I'd bet dollars to donuts that they will. It would probably be different if the election had gone the other way, but who knows?"

"Given the ways the polls looked, that was quite a surprise wasn't it?" Ron remarked.

"I didn't make any difference who won Ron." Gary said, "They were both talking about bringing the troops home, just at different times."

"We'd better get home Gar-Bear, they're predicting snow tonight," Ron said.

"Is it going to get this far down?" Gary asked.

"They said maybe 2,800 feet, but they're never right, so I don't want to take a chance," Ron replied.

Ron was right and the weather forecasters were wrong. The Antelope Valley got 3" of snow. There was still snow on the ground on Valentine's Day when Gary got Ron to take him to pick up his Winchester. They got to the gun store about 9:15 and it looked like she was locking up.

"Hey wait a minute," Gary yelled, "I'm here to pick up my rifle."

She unlocked the door. "We have to hurry, I'm closing up," the owner said.

"Why?" Ron asked.

"You haven't heard?" she asked. "Someone blew up the natural gas pipelines coming into California around 15 minutes ago."

"Really?" Ron said. "You were right Gar-Bear, they went for the pipelines."

"I just hope they stop there," Gary said, "I have a Winchester to pick up. The name is Gary Olsen."

She went into the back room and returned a few minutes later. "Here, I'm not going to reopen and you have this Ruger on hold until the 19th," she said, "You'd better take it now. Do you guys need any ammo? It's cash only."

"I'll pass," Gary said.

“Give me 4 bricks of .22LR,” Ron said, “That’s all the cash I have.”

They quickly finished their business and headed back to Gary’s. The gal had the closed sign up and the door locked before they’d even gotten in Ron’s car.

“I wouldn’t have minded being wrong, you know,” Gary said. “Do you know how to change the jets in my furnace, stove, dryer and hot water heater?”

“I’ll drop you off and go home and check on Lyn, Gar-Bear,” Ron said. I’ll switch my jets and then we’ll both come over to your house and I’ll do yours. Shut off the natural gas feed, but don’t turn on the propane feed until I get over there, ok?”

“Sure thing Ron,” Gary said, “I sure hope the TV stations are operating.”

Apparently Adelphia had backup power; some of the channels were on the air. Gary turned on CNN and sat down to watch the news and find out just what was going on. Talk about a mess; the announcers were talking over each other trying to report explosions all over the country. There was no word of any nukes going off, but select pipelines and portions of the power grid were down over most of the country. Since some of the power generation facilities were powered by natural gas, they couldn’t generate electricity and those that could, had nowhere for it to go. There was a serious winter storm stretching from the Midwest almost to the east coast, too. Then, without explanation, the feed from CNN dropped off the air. Gary turned to FOX news, but they were off the air too.

CNN had studios in Atlanta and New York. FOX’s principal studio was in New York. Gary wondered what it meant. Had something happened to New York? Or, Washington? Or, perhaps Atlanta? As he was soon to learn, the answer was Y-E-S. Those nukes that Gary said the Arabs could never get past the feds exploded in those three cities plus Chicago, San Francisco and Los Angeles. Adelphia stopped broadcasting so Gary turned on his radio to KTPI, 103.1 on the FM band. They were broadcasting the emergency tone. That’s all; no news, just the EAS tone. A couple of minutes of tone preceded the announcer.

KTPI has just learned that a nuclear explosion has occurred in Los Angeles, the announcer said.

Gary grabbed the phone to call Ron, but the phone was dead. He went to his office and looked at his residential gateway that accessed the Internet. There was a red light where it said ‘Broadband Link’. He checked the second line on the two-line phone on his desk. It was dead, confirming the light on the router. No TV, no phones and only an excited radio announcer to feed them news. Gary tried the other FM radio frequencies, especially the LA stations, but came up blank. On AM, he could get the stations in Lancaster, but the Palmdale AM station had switched to Spanish language format years before.

Ron and Linda pulled in and walked to the house.

"Have you had the TV or radio on?" Gary asked.

"No. I switched my jets and came right over," Ron said, "What's going on?"

"Nothing much," Gary shook his head, "Just a nuke in LA. You know, the usual crap."

"You're a sick SOB," Ron said, "What do you mean, 'the usual crap'?"

"Well, I was watching CNN," Gary explained, "They were doing a live feed from the White House. They just plain went off the air. I switched to FOX and they were off the air. KTPI reported a nuke went off in LA. I'd speculate that one probably went off in both New York and Atlanta. CNN transmits from Atlanta and FOX from New York."

"Any other cities get hit?" Ron asked.

"Darned if I know, partner," Gary said, "I wish I could tell you more."

"Let me get those jets changed and get the hell back home," Ron said. "What direction is the wind out of, do you know?"

"The west, same as always," Gary said, "Why?"

"I was just wondering if we'd get any fallout from LA," Ron said, "But if the wind is out of the due west, we might be okay."

"Wouldn't make a hell of a lot of difference anyway, partner," Gary said, "If the radiation came our way, we don't have a basement or storm shelter to crawl into anyway."

"We could bug out," Ron said.

"To where?" Gary asked. "Until we know where the nukes were set off, we wouldn't know which direction to go. Hell, they could have hit Vegas or Phoenix or San Francisco or any number of cities."

"Call me when you find out," Ron said.

"I can't. The phones are out," Gary explained.

"Cells phones, too?" Ron asked.

"I didn't try; try yours," Gary suggested.

Linda shook her head indicating that she couldn't get a dial tone on her cell phone.

"If yours is out, mine probably is too," Gary said.

"It's a shame that we don't have any radios," Ron observed.

"Chris has 3, but I doubt that they would reach from your house to my house," Gary observed.

"That's a real fly in the ointment," Ron said, "We don't have any cash so we can't buy any either."

"Assuming you could find a store open," Gary said. "You didn't happen to swing by Albertson's did you?"

"No. It's the other way. Why?" Ron asked.

"I'll bet all of the grocery stores are mob scenes," Gary replied, "I'd avoid them if I could."

"We're going straight home partner. What are you going to do?" Ron said.

"Load my guns and pray," Gary responded. "I don't have a Geiger counter, I don't have a basement if there was radiation and until I know what's going on, I'm not going anywhere."

"You have another transistor radio?" Ron asked.

"Take one of the boom boxes sitting by the fireplace," Gary said, "You do have batteries don't you?"

"I have D cells," Ron said.

"One of the boxes takes D cells and the other C cells, be sure you get the right one," Gary suggested.

Clarence and Lucy pulled up, their car fully laden.

"Well, from the radio," Clarence said, "TSHTF."

"What have you heard, partner?" Ron asked.

"So far, New York, Washington, Atlanta, Chicago, San Francisco and LA have been hit," Clarence answered.

"Any other cities?" Gary asked.

"Not that I know of," Clarence said, "Ain't that enough?"

Preparations – Chapter 6 – Oops!

Gary thought he was pretty well prepared. In most respects, he was, he had guns and ammo, food and water and medical supplies. He didn't have a Geiger counter, a shelter or any of those Potassium Iodide pills either. The pills were pretty cheap. But, according to what Gary had read, the danger came from inhaled radiation and he did have a lot of N-95 masks, to be exact, 5 boxes of 20 each. He decided that the four of them should wear masks for the next few days. Make that the 8 of them; he saw Amy, DeWayne and the kids pulling in.

"Gary, I think that I'd better go after Lorrie and the kids," Sharon said.

"Ok, I wonder if David is ok?" Gary thought aloud.

"I have no idea," Sharon said, "He has to be at work at 8am in the Valley."

"Well, at least Chris was on hiatus from the show," Gary said, "So they're okay."

Chris worked on the ET set at the Paramount Studios in downtown Hollywood. If he had been at work that day, he'd have never made it home. It turned out that David was late leaving for work because of a party Sunday night. Maybe having a hangover wasn't too heavy a price to pay for your life. David was just nearing the Sand Canyon off ramp on the 14 when the bomb went off. He happened to be looking away from the blast. He had pulled up the off ramp and headed directly back to Palmdale. He arrived home around the same time that Sharon arrived to pick up Lorrie. Sharon had them get some changes of clothes and clean out their cupboards. They didn't have much food on hand, so that didn't take too long.

Patti flagged Sharon down when Sharon returned to Moon Shadows. She wanted to know what Sharon could spare in the food department. She said she'd tried Albertson's and Stater Brothers, but the shelves were almost bare by the time she got there. Sharon and Patti had been good friends for a long time. Back in 1996 when Gary had pulled his disappearing act, Patti had gotten Sharon through the event. For all practical purposes, there wasn't anything that Sharon wouldn't do for Patti. On the other hand, Patti would never abuse the friendship. It was a good thing that Gary had bought the extra beans and rice, there was enough food for everyone for a while.

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Gary didn't seem to mind sharing with Chris and Patti, but he told Chris he sure would like to use the radios. Chris told Gary sure, that was what they were for; although he never thought it would be in a situation like this. Chris said the radios were fully charged and gave Gary a radio and charger for Ron. If it worked, great, Chris said otherwise, bring it back. Gary explained about the fallout and the risk to the thyroid and gave Chris a box of the N-95 masks. He suggested that they wear them until someone could figure out the radiation situation. Chris told Gary that the Sheriff's Department or the Fire De-

partment ought to have radiation detection equipment, why didn't he run Gary over to Ron's and then down to the Sheriff's Station?

If Chris was willing to go to the Sheriff's Station, and not at the point of a gun, Gary figured, he was taking the situation pretty seriously. Patti agreed to wait on the patio with a radio for 15 minutes. If they didn't connect by then, the radios wouldn't reach. It only took Gary and Chris 5 minutes to get to Ron's house, but the distance was just too far for the radios. Motorola said they'd reach a mile or more, but that must have been under ideal conditions. The next stop was the Sheriff's Station. When they arrived at the Substation, they kept their masks on. The Deputy behind the counter was a bit surprised, but he told them that if any radiation were detected, the patrol cars would cover Palmdale with their loudspeakers. He also confirmed the six cities that had been hit and that California was completely without electricity.

Palmdale used a gravity feed water system. They would have water until the tanks went dry and after that only if the City could get electricity to the well pumps. They were now up to 15 people, Gary and Sharon, Clarence and Lucy, Amy and her 3 and Lorrie and her 6. There was plenty of food, even including Chris and Patti and the 2 boys, but Gary figured it wouldn't be too long before they had to scrounge for a few things. He wanted some of the 25-watt business radios, hopefully on the same frequency as Chris's handhelds. Gary couldn't remember the frequencies anymore, but the scanners were set to pick up the radios and it was easy to do a slow count and get the two radio frequencies on the scanners. Besides, Chris probably had the paperwork somewhere.

The news on the radio could only be described as spotty. KTPI was broadcasting mostly local Palmdale and Tehachapi news. Once an hour, they broadcast about 5 minutes of national news. Gary was real curious how they managed to get national news, but it really didn't amount to that much anyway. This had been some Valentine's Day. It sort of gave a whole new meaning to the term 'St. Valentine's Day Massacre'. According to the news, the terrorists had exploded the bombs near City Hall in all of the cities except Washington. The DC bomb had gone off at the FBI building, which is located about halfway between the White House and the Capitol. The damage was somewhat limited due to the small size of the bombs, 1 kiloton. Consider the following article:

LEBED SOLDIERS ON WITH MISSING BOMB CLAIMS

(Moscow Times, Sept 10, 1997) by Richard C. Paddock (LA Times)

Alexander Lebed, the former Russian general and presidential hopeful, has been broadcasting his claim over the past week that Russia has lost track of 100 nuclear bombs the size of suitcases.

"A very thorough investigation is necessary," Lebed reiterated to reporters Monday, September 8. "The state of nuclear security in Russia poses a danger to the whole world."

The general's allegations are roundly denied by Russian officials, who contend that all of Russia's nuclear weapons are safely under control.

In his previous post as President Boris Yeltsin's top security adviser, Lebed might have been in a position to know about such secrets. But the president fired him nearly a year ago.

Now Lebed – who negotiated last year's peace accord with Chechnya – is a political outsider who is trying to revive his career and build a base for a potential run at the presidency in the year 2000, when Yeltsin must step down.

"How can a serious politician make such a sensational statement without the checking of facts first?" said Vladimir Uvatenko, chief spokesman for the Defense Ministry. "This scandalous statement was clearly made by Alexander Lebed to get the attention of the press and boost his waning political image and declining popularity."

Despite the official denials, Lebed is pursuing his allegations undeterred. In an interview with CBS television's "60 Minutes" aired Sunday, Lebed said the suitcase bombs were ideal weapons for terrorists because they could be armed and detonated by a single person within 30 minutes.

One of the one-kiloton bombs could kill 100,000 people, he said. Of 250 suitcases devices made by the Soviet Union, he said, 100 are unaccounted for.

On Monday, Lebed was quoted by Interfax as saying he had learned of the existence of the bombs 11 months ago when he was Yeltsin's security adviser. Since that time, he said, he has been able to prove to his own satisfaction that the weapons were real.

Lebed said the suitcase bombs were deployed in special brigades in some of the empire's remote regions. After the break-up of the Soviet state, many of the suitcases vanished in what became independent republics, where they could fall into the hands of terrorists, he said.

In Washington, US officials say they have no information that any of Russia's nuclear weapons, whatever their size, have been offered for sale on the world's black markets.

So what was the truth about the missing 100 suitcase nukes? Well, the only thing Gary was certain of was the 6 of them weren't missing anymore. There wasn't much news about all of the pipeline and electrical substation bombings; they probably weren't as interesting as the nukes. The good news, or bad news depending on your political affiliations, was that the President and First Lady had been in Philadelphia for something or other and had been spared the bombing. They'd cranked up Air Force One in a big hurry and moved to Cheyenne Mountain. Congress wasn't so lucky, but a lot of the Representatives and Senators had been somewhere other than the Capitol and had escaped the carnage. The radio didn't say which Senators and Representatives had been spared; with the luck the US was having at the moment, probably all of the liberals!

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For some strange reason no one was very hungry that evening. Gary was content to drink a Coke and eat an Almond Snickers, screw the blood sugar. He was reconsidering whom they had to be careful of. He had, for many years, been fearful that a major earthquake would strike LA and thousands of survivors would come pouring up the 14 and into the Antelope Valley. After the Northridge quake, he'd sort of dismissed the idea as unlikely.

This was a whole different scenario. It wasn't just about some broken buildings anymore; it was about people fleeing from radiation. Whether there was radiation in the San Fernando Valley or not, was insignificant. What mattered was people's perception of the danger. The blast damage was probably limited to downtown and to the south, he speculated, the mountains would shield the Valley, but only from the blast itself. That mushroom shaped cloud would get people moving, by car if it worked and on foot if it didn't. Probably by car, he decided, a suitcase nuke would have been detonated near ground level and the mountains would have probably blocked the EMP.

After Ron had left, Gary had done just what he said he was going to do; he loaded all of the magazines for all of his weapons, 18 rounds in the M1A mags, 27 in the Mini-14 mags and a full 8 in the PT1911 mags. However, because of his neuropathy, he opted to go with the Ruger and Winchester. What the hell, he used to practice his fast draw with his Super Blackhawk. He wasn't particularly fast, but he could hit a man-sized target out to about 20', as long as he didn't try to draw too fast. Didn't really matter how fast you could draw if you couldn't hit what you were shooting at.

Anyway, back to Gary's concerns about the visitors from the Valley. Now, if the people were smart, they'd have taken time to get food around and such, but panic always seemed to outweigh smart, so it was a good bet that they'd show up with nothing more than the clothes on their backs; and guns, if they had any. People always seemed to remember their guns, even if they were panicked. Or was that because they were panicked? Whatever, the Antelope Valley was going to have a large influx of people, in his humble opinion. There weren't really all that many Deputies assigned to the Antelope Valley, not when one considered how many people lived in the San Fernando Valley. Of course a fair share of them would head up the I-5, but when it bogged down with traffic, they'd probably spill over onto the 14.

"David could you and the boys work out some sort of schedule to stand guard tonight?" Gary asked Lorrie's significant other.

"Are you expecting trouble Gary?" David asked.

"Oh, I don't know, but there are going to be a lot of people pouring out of the Valley," Gary said, "So it might be smart to keep an eye out."

“Do you want us armed?” David asked, “The boys haven’t fired that many guns.”

“Well maybe a shotgun,” Gary said, “I think that Chris has one of those air horns. I’ll go see if I can borrow it.”

◦

“Chris, I’m going to have David and the boys stand guard tonight, can I borrow that air horn of yours,” Gary asked.

“Sure. Are they going to be on the radio?” Chris asked.

“I hadn’t thought of that,” Gary said, “But keep your radio on channel 1 and if you hear the air horn, you can call and find out what’s going on.”

“I sort of hate to ask, but do you suppose I could borrow a shotgun or something?” Chris asked.

“The boys are using mine, but if Clarence will let you use his, sure,” Gary replied, “If not, do you want the battle rifle or the assault rifle?”

“Anything that will put them down with one shot,” Chris grimaced.

“Ok a shotgun with 00 buck or the M1A,” Gary said, “You want me to bring it back or do you want to come down and get it?”

“I’ll walk along, you look pretty done in,” Chris said.

“You don’t know the half of it, pal,” Gary laughed. “Come on.”

Clarence was more than willing to let Chris use his shotgun for the night, because he had his new rifle. Clarence had picked up a Garand and 3 cases of the Korean surplus. His thumb still showed the purple bruising he’d gotten learning to load the weapon. But, that wasn’t a lesson you really needed to learn many times. Clarence gave Chris the gun and a 25 round box of #4 buck. That ought to stop anyone in their tracks he said. The shotgun was a 590A1 and Chris was familiar with the mechanism. But, working in Hollywood all of those years, he tended to be a little on the liberal side and didn’t own any guns. Gary had a sneaking feeling that was about to change abruptly. It was the old you’re a liberal until you’re mugged bit.

Gary took some time and made sure David and the boys understood the operation of the 590A1. He also pointed out that they shouldn’t shoot except as a last resort and that the gun was loaded with 3” magnum 00 buck and that it had hefty recoil.

Preparations – Chapter 7 – Sorting It Out

Their house really wasn't big enough to handle the 15 people that were there. It was a 3-bedroom house, but one of the bedrooms had been converted to a sewing room and was wall-to-wall furniture. The master bedroom had a king sized bed and the other bedroom a twin-sized trundle that made up a king sized bed when setup. Putting people on the back patio to sleep wasn't much of an option; the generator was too loud to let anyone sleep. There were, however, several empty homes in the tract. The house between Gary and Chris was empty; the young kids who bought it apparently couldn't afford the payments and had resold the house. Dan and Dawn had lived in the house on the other side of Gary and Sharon's but had sold out after 17 years to take advantage of the high prices of homes and perhaps because their girls were grown and gone.

It was exactly 10' between Gary's utilities and the utilities for the house between his and Chris's. Tomorrow, they could run some electricity to the house. David was a locksmith and he had the door to that home open in the blink of an eye. It was too late in the evening to do more than give Lorrie and David the oil lamps for light and the twin box springs and mattress in the garage. They would stay in the empty home next door. Gary gave Clarence and Lucy the master bedroom and put Amy and her brood in the spare bedroom. He took his pills and insulin, got in his recliner and was asleep in minutes.

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David found a small pile of wood in the neighbor's back yard and built a fire in the fireplace. He erected the twin bed in the living room near the fireplace for Lorrie. He also found 3 forgotten cribs in his in-laws garage and set one up for Jeffrey. Gary had conked out on them after pointing everyone to a spot to spend the night. David and his boys kept watch of the area from an upstairs bedroom window. He didn't know how things were going to work out; all he knew was that he was out of a job, all but broke and the country was in one hell of a mess. There was no trouble that night.

The smell of coffee brewing woke Gary the next morning. He was his usual groggy self until he had some coffee and a couple of cigarettes. The good news was that the Xanax he took let him sleep, regardless; the bad news was that it took him an hour to wake up each morning. He'd gone for a year of nearly sleepless nights trying to get off the pill, but had finally gotten the doctor to prescribe 0.5 mg TID. Since he only took one pill a day, and he got 90 pills at a time, he had enough Xanax built up to last him 3 years. Anyway, after he had some caffeine and nicotine he was starting to come alive.

"Gary, it don't seem right putting you and Sharon out of your bed," Clarence said.

"If we could get a truck, we could move your possessions to Dan and Dawn's house," Gary replied. "It's sitting empty. Then, we could figure out some way to run electricity over to the house. I've got to do the same for David and Lorrie, so it just makes sense to do it for you and Lucy."

"I got to find my sister, too," Clarence said. "She's probably sitting in that apartment scared to death."

"We need to come up with a truck or something to move all of the furniture," Gary observed.

"What about the folks that bought those houses?" Clarence asked, "Won't they be showing up wanting to move in?"

"I understand that the couple that bought Dan and Dawn's home were moving here from San Francisco," Gary said. "He got a job in LA. Assuming they survived the hit on San Francisco, he would have no reason to move to LA at the moment, so you should be able to use the house for a while, at least until they get the utilities back up. Why don't you just move your beds and maybe a couch and kitchen table? We should be able to manage that in Ron and David's vans."

"What about the people that bought the house on the other side where David and Lorrie stayed last night?" Clarence asked.

"Clarence, I don't have the slightest idea who bought that house," Gary admitted, "If they show up, we'll just have to move Lorrie and David out."

"I'll go find my sister and bring her back here," Clarence said. "Then, I'll go get Ron and get him to help me move a little of the furniture. We couldn't bring all of the food, so we'll have to bring that, too."

"Why don't I ask if 2 of David's boys can give you a hand?" Gary suggested.

"I'd appreciate that, if you wouldn't mind," Clarence acknowledged.

Gary took a Navy shower to conserve the hot water and got dressed. He asked David to pick the locks on Dan and Dawn's house and to send 2 boys with Clarence. He also gave David his PT1911, just in case. Then, he went to the office to have a smoke and listen to the radio. KTPI was reporting that a large group of people was coming into the Antelope Valley from LA. The Sheriff's Department was segregating the people, putting those that were prepared in the stadium of Palmdale High School and those that were unprepared in the stadium at Highland High School. So far, according to the radio, things were reasonably calm in the Antelope Valley.

The Antelope Valley was a bedroom community, with 85% of the people who were employed working in the greater Los Angeles area. There were 3 grocery chains in the area, 2 served by warehouses in LA and one, Stater Brothers, supplied from Bakersfield. As Gary listened to the radio, it became apparent to him that only Stater Brothers had the capacity to resupply the grocery stores in the AV. That was going to be a problem in the days to come. Banks were scrambling, according to the radio, to get their systems back online so that people could access their funds and get essentials. Arnold had de-

clared martial law and was sending troops to not only San Francisco and Los Angeles, but to the communities where refugee camps were springing up. Gary wondered if Derek was going to end up getting sent to Chicago to help clean up that mess.

During the 5 minutes of national news, KTPI reported that the President had declared martial law for the entire US and had activated all National Guard units. There were no figures on the death tolls as yet, but apparently, the nukes had accounted for only a few million deaths, primarily because of where they had been set off. However, there was great concern over the effects of the fallout and numerous relocation centers were being established by FEMA. The President had also ordered all aviation, except for military flights, grounded for the interim. All US ports were closed until the military could be brought in to inspect 100% of the cargo entering the US. Talk about closing the barn door after the horses were gone... Oh, and the UN, or what remained of it, was offering, or was that demanding, to bring in peacekeeping forces to the US to 'restore order' and assist with rebuilding the country. The President had declined the offer of assistance.

There were one or two other rather interesting pieces of national news; the President had ordered all US forces out of foreign countries. The US was at DECON 2 for the foreseeable future, and the Threat Level was Red. This was an intelligence failure of monumental proportions in Gary's opinion. The country had been at Threat Level Yellow the morning before when the terrorists struck. Now, millions were dead or dying, the lights were off everywhere and 6 cities lay in ruins. It was just a shame that we would be stuck with this administration for the next 4 years.

Chris interrupted Gary's reverie. Darlene had been busy organizing the neighbors and they were putting a barricade at the entrance of the tract to control traffic flow in and out. He needed the radio that David and the boys were using.

"How are you making out, Chris?" Gary asked.

"I've got the generator running to provide electricity for the lights and we're using the fireplace for heat," Chris said. "I'll be out of gasoline and firewood pretty quick, though."

"I'll loan you 20-gallons of gasoline," Gary said, "but you'll have to replace it pretty quickly, it's my bugout gas. I can't help you on firewood; we put in that gas log and got rid of our firewood a long time ago. I've been thinking we should take the gas log out and try and heat the house with the fireplace if I can find some wood. The thing is, I don't have any money to buy any firewood. And, until they get the phones back up, I can't call Iowa and ask them to put extra money in my trust fund."

Unbeknownst to Gary, Matt had transferred \$10,000 to his checking account, figuring that Gary would need the money. The only problem with that was that Gary didn't have an ATM card for his Iowa account and didn't know that he had money to burn in the Iowa checking account. It was unlikely that anyone would take a check on the Iowa account, either; at least, not until the mess around the country was sorted out. You'll have to give the banker credit; as soon as the wire transfer system came back online he

transferred those funds to Gary's Wells Fargo account. It was the least he could do considering how much the bank charged for managing the trust fund. (0.95% of the highest principal balance, per year)

Gary was taking stock of where he had gone wrong in his preparations. The most obvious lapse was the failure to prepare for a nuclear event. He should have had a Geiger counter and Potassium Iodide/Iodate pills. Secondly, He had assumed that they would have natural gas for a while after an event, so he only had 2,000 gallons of propane. Fortunately, they weren't running the generator at full capacity, but if he extended electricity to the other two houses that would abruptly change. The gas log in the fireplace was a lot more convenient than burning wood and cleaning up ashes, but he hadn't considered the possibility of removing the gas log and burning wood. Therefore, he didn't have a cord of wood stacked up next to the shed as he had in the past.

Then, there was the question of a fallout/storm shelter, or rather, the lack of a shelter. He should have put a basement or shelter under at least a portion of the patio slab, but hadn't because of the cost. The most glaring problem was the lack of having some ready money on hand. In his zeal to provide security, electricity, food, water and medical supplies, they had spent down their checking accounts and had no ready cash on hand. Given the circumstances that they found themselves in, a little ready cash would have solved the firewood problem, if nothing else.

On the other hand, he did have security, electricity, food, water and medical supplies. With some careful conservation, he could extend those supplies to keep them going for quite a while. If he only ran the generator briefly during the day and night to keep the freezers cold, the propane would last a long time. They could schedule showers and such during the times that the generator was up and further conserve. Food was the least of his concerns; they had plenty, especially since he'd bought all of the beans and rice.

Communications were a problem, but only because Ron and Linda were over a mile away. A simple CB radio would have solved that issue, but he had gotten rid of all of his CB's and disposed of the ground plane antenna. Here again, if he had a little cash, he might have been able to pick up a CB at Radio Shack, if they were still open. At the moment, he admitted to himself, he'd be willing to kiss a skunk for a couple of thousand dollars in cash. Ron, he figured, was as well off as he was. Ron had spent his last \$40 at the gun store on those 4 bricks of .22LR and he didn't have any wood for his fireplace either. Ron only had ½ as much propane as he did, so he'd probably run out unless he conserved.

At the moment, security didn't seem to be a problem. The Sheriff's Department was out in full force, National Guard troops were supposedly coming to the AV and the neighbors were guarding the housing tract. With the food supply being curtailed, as it was, there was no telling how long that would last. FEMA was up to handling one or two disasters at a time. But, 6 cities had been attacked and pipelines and substations blown up all over the country. How long would security continue to not be a problem?

And then, like a bolt out of the blue, many of his problems began to resolve themselves. Ron showed up late in the day on the 15th with a Uniden SSB CB radio and a Wilson 5000 antenna for him. Wells Fargo was back online and Radio Shack was open! Gary got Sharon to drive him to the Wells Fargo branch and he stuck in his card and checked his balance, figuring he could pull out \$40 or \$60. To his shock, his account balance was \$10,054.36. Unfortunately, the branch wasn't open, so he couldn't withdraw money directly from his account. He took the \$300 maximum daily allowance and got Sharon to drive him to Radio Shack. There, he bought 3 of the Uniden SSB CB's and 3 of the Wilson 5000 antennas. He would have bought more, but Wells Fargo limited his direct ATM purchases to \$1,000 per day.

Gary knew where he could get firewood, if the guys were still around. Once he got the CB up and running (unit Olsen-1), he called Ron (unit Green-1) and asked him to come over so they could go see about buying firewood. Since Chris needed firewood, too he got Chris to ride along. The guy in Littlerock had plenty of firewood, but he wanted \$300 cash a cord for it, delivered or not. Ron bought a cord and Gary bought 2, telling the guy he'd pay for the 1st cord now and the 2nd when it was delivered. Chris, it seemed, didn't have much money in the bank and Gary was staking him to a cord of wood. Isn't it amazing what you can do when you have a little cash on hand?

The next day, the 16th, Gary and Sharon went back to the Radio Shack and bought the last Uniden SSB radio and Wilson antenna. The store still had a half dozen handheld CB's so they bought the lot. Everyone else seemed to be buying the FRS radios. Then, they went by the branch to see if the bank was open. It was and after carefully calculating his balance, Gary tried to withdraw the remaining funds from his account. Cash was going to be king for the foreseeable future. The bank was limiting withdrawals to \$5,000 per day, however. There was always tomorrow and he was a hell of a lot better off than he'd been just 2 days before, so Gary didn't complain.

The Sheriff's substation was next door to the branch, so Gary checked with them about the possibility of driving to Bakersfield for more groceries. The Deputy told him that would be a problem for several reasons. Bakersfield was being hit hard on food and there wasn't much available. More importantly, travel was being severely restricted for the next 2 weeks until things settled down and the authorities could get a handle on the refugee situation. If he had enough food to get by, the Deputy advised, Gary ought to consider putting off any trips for a while. Stater Brothers stores, according to the Deputy, were allowing limited cash purchases, but you had to sign up and wait your turn. They didn't really need any food, they decided, but they sure needed diapers and formula for Jeffrey. He was almost 2, so he could eat the same food they did, but he still was on the bottle and wasn't potty trained, yet. Walmart was just down the street.

Preparations – Chapter 8 – Growing Unrest

Walmart had been hit hard and didn't have much in the way of merchandise. They got what formula and disposable diapers they could and headed back home. In their absence, the guys from Littlerock had delivered a full cord of wood. Gary got David's boys to move $\frac{1}{4}$ of the wood each to Dan and Dawn's, David and Lorrie's and Chris and Patti's homes. Then, he proceeded to remove the gas log, cap the pipe and start a fire in the fireplace. The fireplace put out a lot of heat, it always had, and he turned off the furnace. The next problem to address was getting electricity to the houses on either side of theirs. It was Chris to the rescue this time. He had several heavy duty, 100' extension cords that he used at the racetrack; he also had two of the pigtail extensions that converted a single line into three lines. Gary had 4 spare circuit breakers in the garage, they seemed to be wearing out and he'd stocked up. Since the generator was down, it was no problem wiring in two 20-amp breakers and connecting a pigtail to each breaker.

Chris ran 2 of the heavy-duty extension cords over Gary's roof to Dan and Dawn's house and wired them into the fuse box. Gary cut up an old extension cord into 2 20' lengths and added plugs. He wired the other ends of the cords into the fuse box for the house Lorrie and David were living in. He turned off the breaker for the air conditioner and furnace and restarted the generator. Things were moving along. A couple of times, people had tried to enter the tract, but had been turned away when they couldn't establish to anyone's satisfaction that they had a legitimate reason to enter the tract. Could it be that security was becoming a concern?

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"Green-1, this is Olsen-1, come in," Gary spoke into the CB.

"Green-1," Ron replied.

"How are you making out?" Gary asked.

"We're ok so far, how are you making out?" Ron replied.

"We have all of the bases covered and have both houses wired," Gary answered, "How is the gas holding out?"

"I'm down enough to justify having a delivery," Ron said, "How about you?"

"Send them to our place after they top you off," Gary replied, "I need to top off, too. Had any boogies?"

"Negative," Ron replied, "You?"

"They put up a roadblock at the gate," Gary said, hoping Ron would understand, "I'll give them your name."

“How’s the chow?” Ron asked.

“I’m in heaven,” Gary replied, “But the XYL (ex young lady=wife) is already hating the chili and rice.”

“10-4, T-T-Y-L, ciao,” Ron said and signed off.

“Ciao,” Gary replied and laid down the mike.

Chris hadn’t offered to return Clarence’s shotgun and Gary went to talk to him about it.

“If I can get you your own shotgun and front the money for it,” Gary asked, “Do you want one?”

“Wouldn’t mind having a rifle and handgun either,” Chris replied. “And some ammo.”

“I’ll see what I can do for you Chris, I need to get Clarence’s shotgun back to him,” Gary said.

Gary picked up the mike to the CB he’d set up at Chris’s. “Green-1, this is Olsen-1,” he said.

“You’ve got me,” Ron replied.

“You know where we were when the balloon went up?” Gary asked.

“10-4,” Ron replied.

“Can you contact her?” Gary asked.

“Why?” Ron asked.

“Car 51 needs some equipment,” Gary said referring to the number on Chris’s racecar.

“I’ll get back to you. Ciao,” Ron replied and signed off.

This night was meatloaf; Sharon was already tired of the chili and rice. Nobody had been around looking for food, yet. They were supposed to be at the Stater Brother’s store at 9:30am the next morning for their \$100 allotment of groceries. Since they didn’t need any staples, Sharon suggested that they just buy meat, like pot roasts and steaks. Gary agreed to a point, but it was going to be more like pot roasts, hamburger and chicken if it was available. If Sharon really wanted steak, she could buy just one for her, but the rest of them were going to eat more sensibly.

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When Sharon saw the price of steak at Stater Brother's the next day, she agreed to go along with the pot roasts, hamburger and chicken, which they did happen to have. It turned out that \$100 didn't go too far when all you bought was meat. Stater Brother's wasn't price gouging, but there was the law of supply and demand and they were paying premium prices to keep their shelves stocked. The average price for the cheap cuts of beef was \$4 a pound and chickens were \$5 each for the small fryers. As it was, the store was closing as soon as they sold out and resupplying overnight. The CHP was providing an armed escort for the semis.

The bombs that went off in the 6 cities were proving to be dirty, according to KTPI, and the federal authorities had ordered that the cities not be entered for two weeks. There simply weren't enough protective suits to go around, or, they weren't where they needed to be. The US was well prepared to handle a single nuclear event, but 6 went way beyond the capacity of the system to respond in a meaningful way. KTPI also reported that US authorities had arrested a group of 5 men, apparently with Middle Eastern backgrounds, but didn't have any further information about the arrests.

"Olsen-1, this is Green-1," the CB blared.

Olsen-1 here," Gary replied.

"Tracked her down," Ron said, "Terms are cash and carry at 125% of MSRP."

"What time?" Gary asked.

"See you in 5," Ron answered.

Gary was waiting when Ron pulled up in front of the house.

"Have any trouble at the entrance?" Gary asked.

"Nope. She said that she wasn't going to bother with the waiting periods, but she has to have a premium for her merchandise," Ron explained.

"What does she have?" Gary asked.

"A lot of stuff that isn't on the books," Ron replied. "Keeps it at her home."

"Then I guess that Chris is just going to have to settle for what I can get him," Gary said.

\$3,000 later, Gary had a Mossberg 500 (new), a Mini-14 Ranch rifle (new), an Argentinean M1911 copy (used), magazines and a fair amount of ammo. He persuaded Ron to stop by the branch so he could clean out his account. Gary filled out a withdrawal slip

but left the amount blank, asking the cashier what the balance was in his account so he could fill out the withdrawal slip.

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"I'm sorry Mr. Olsen, but we have a \$5,000 limit on withdrawals," the cashier replied.

"I shouldn't have more than \$3,000 give or take," Gary said.

"We received another transfer from Iowa," the cashier said, "The same amount as last time."

"I'll take the \$5,000," Gary said.

"Did you get the money?" Ron asked when Gary returned to the car.

"Actually, more than I planned," Gary said, "The bank in Iowa transferred another 10k into my account."

"How come?" Ron asked.

"I have no idea Ronald, but I'm not going to look a gift horse in the mouth," Gary laughed. "Besides, with hamburger at \$4 a pound, we can use the money."

Back in Iowa, Derek had driven to Charles City on the 15th of February. He'd had a talk with Matt at the bank and explained his Dad's location and probable situation. Matt and he had agreed that, under the circumstances, the trust would distribute \$25,000 to each of the 3 beneficiaries of the trust, Sharon, Derek and Damon. They gave Derek \$25,000 in cash and said when Damon showed up they'd do the same for him. They would put \$10,000 a day into Gary and Sharon's joint account for 2 days and \$5,000 on the third day. Since his Dad didn't have an ATM card on the bank, Matt said that they would wire the money to Gary's Wells Fargo account.

Derek had been called to active duty, but as a SSgt in command of his own tank. His particular assignment was to provide security for the Capitol Complex in Des Moines. Before he reported for duty, Derek stopped by the gun dealer he knew in Des Moines and bought 2 M-9's, 2 AR-15's, 38 30-round magazines and 10 cases of ammo. Mary had been in the Army and was better with the M-16 than Derek was. They were about equal with M-9's. Things weren't really all that bad in Iowa except for the power outage and the loss of natural gas. But, the cash in hand got them a large tank of propane, a plumber to convert their appliances and a 15kw propane powered generator.

Derek had worked in supply for a while and had several buddies in the supply unit. He had a talk with one of those buddies and explained that he had 2 brand new Colt AR-15's. What could his buddy do, he asked, to convert them to M16A2's? His friend told him to bring them in, one at a time and he'd see to the conversion (replace the lower

receivers). Derek had one of the AR-15's in his trunk and got it and gave it to the man. His buddy told him that he needed a couple of days; he'd let him know when the rifle was ready. Des Moines, by the way, still had cell phone service.

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Neither the Sheriff's Department nor the Fire Department had detected any radiation in the Palmdale area due to fallout. However, some of the late arrivals from Los Angeles were making the instruments buzz. This third group of arrivals was being sheltered in an area north of the AV Mall on 10th Street West in Palmdale. With 3 separate groups to supervise, the Sheriff's Department was getting spread a little thin. The troops that Arnold had promised had yet to arrive. However, the local National Guard Unit reported to the Sheriff's Department to lend a hand. So far, they were keeping a lid on the situation, but getting food and water to the growing numbers of refugees was becoming problematic. The CHP had problems of its own and was unable to assist.

Ron dropped Gary off at the Chris's house. Chris was glad to have the rifle, shotgun and pistol, but almost choked when Gary told him that the total came to 3 grand, even.

"Timing is everything Chris," Gary laughed.

"What do you mean?" Chris asked.

"A week ago, the same stuff would have cost you under 2 grand," Gary said. "She sold everything for 20% off MSRP. Today, she got 125% of MSRP."

"That doesn't seem right," Chris said.

"Today, there was no 10 or 15 day waiting period," Gary said. "Can I have Clarence's shotgun, please?"

Walking over to Clarence and Lucy's Gary was amused by Chris's reaction. A bird in the hand was worth 2 in the bush and Chris had just been mugged. Maybe he wouldn't be so liberal in the future. If it had been up to Chris, they still wouldn't have any guns in the house, but Patti was far more pragmatic. She remembered that night a long time back when some of Amy's gangster friends had shown up at Sharon's. Chris and Matt had armed themselves with ball bats and headed to Sharon's over the back fences. Along the way, they picked up Kevin, an LAPD officer who lived in the house in between at the time, and his brother. One of the gangsters had been armed and it was a good thing Kevin was there with his badge and gun. By the time a Deputy Sheriff had shown up in response to the 911 call the gangsters were back in their cars with Kevin in one car and his brother in the other. The gangsters ended up back in South Central where they belonged and Chris brought Kevin and his brother home.

"Here you go buddy," Gary said returning the shotgun and ammo to Clarence.

“Chris don’t need it no more?” Clarence asked.

“He has his own now,” Gary replied and left to go home.

Preparations – Chapter 9 – It's Getting Ugly

Stater Brother's was allowing one appointment per family per week and Gary and Sharon made an appointment before they'd left the grocery store for the same day and time the following week. Given the price they'd paid for the meat, Sharon suggested that next time they stock up on pasta and sauces, if they could. Gary was partial to spaghetti and he readily agreed. Sharon had finally found a Marinara sauce that she liked, praise the Lord.

18Feb05...

Gary was up and around earlier than usual. Some nights, he didn't even roll over, it was probably the Xanax, and he'd wake up around 7am with some of his muscles screaming with pain. This was one such morning. He went to the bathroom and headed to the office to sit in front of his computer to have a smoke. For some reason, he happened to look at the router and saw that the light was now green. He excitedly picked up the phone and had a dial tone on both lines. He tried to dial Derek to make sure they were ok, but he got the warbling tone that indicated that the call couldn't go through. He then called Ron to wake him up and tell him the phone service was back on. Uh-duh, the minute the phone rang, Ron would know the phone service was back on!

"Good morning butthead," Ron answered. Gary had forgotten for a moment that Ron had caller ID.

"Did your mother have any children that lived?" Gary asked.

"Just my brother," Ron answered. "What the hell you doing up in the middle of the night?"

"It's 7am," Gary retorted.

"I know," Ron said, "I've been up since 5."

"Trouble?" Gary asked.

"I don't know Gar-Bear," Ron replied, "There was a bunch of tire squealing outside, but by the time I got out of bed, they were gone."

"Did you check everything out?" Gary asked.

"Yeah, nothing out of the ordinary," Ron said.

"Could you pick me up around 9 and drive me to the bank?" Gary asked.

"What's for breakfast?" Ron asked back.

“Uh, pancakes, I suppose,” Gary answered.

“See you at 8:30,” Ron said and hung up.

o

After breakfast, they left for the bank. There seemed to be a lot of patrol cars on the streets; at least a lot more than usual. When they got to the branch, Wells Fargo had an armed guard on the door and he wanted some proof that Gary was a customer. Gary showed him his ATM card and went inside. He made out a withdrawal slip for \$5,000 and got in line. The cashier painfully counted out 250 \$20 bills. She apologized for the inconvenience, but explained that they had been getting hit pretty hard with withdrawals over the past few days. She also told Gary that another \$5,000 had been wired to his account. Gary asked her if he'd be able to get another \$5,000 the next day. She wasn't sure, but he could call before he came since the phones were back up.

They weren't going to be able to go to Stater Brother's again until the 24th and Gary asked Ron if they'd signed up to get food. Ron said they hadn't because money was getting a little short. He'd barely had enough to pay for the propane. Gary didn't say a word; he just counted off 50 of the \$20 bills and stuck them in Ron's shirt pocket. Ron had done the same for him more than once; not \$1,000, but enough that he got through a tough spot. He didn't have to worry either; Ron would make sure that he paid Gary back. They swung by Stater Brother's at 25th Street East and Avenue S and Ron made an appointment to buy food at 11am on the 20th.

“Jeez, partner, I never thought I'd have to make an appointment to buy groceries,” Ron exclaimed.

“Wait until you see the prices,” Gary said, “Hamburger is \$4 a pound and everything has been marked up quite a bit because of the shortages. We bought all meat last time, but are going for pasta and sauces next time.”

“How are Chris and Patti doing?” Ron asked.

“Fine. He almost crapped a brick when I told him how much he owed me for the guns and ammo,” Gary laughed. “I think I'd better loan him some money so they can buy their own food, too.”

“You might be money ahead,” Ron agreed.

“And food ahead, too,” Gary replied. “I'm concerned about you and Linda over there on Sweetbrush, I think that you ought to consider moving into the tract.”

“Where?” Ron asked.

“The house on the corner next to Chris and Patti's is in bank foreclosure and sitting

empty,” Gary said.

“I don’t know if Linda would want to move,” Ron said.

“Ask her Ron,” Gary suggested, “It’s a nice house, similar to yours and if you decided to move, we could probably get half the tract to help you move. You can get AmeriGas to move your propane tanks and I’ll cover the cost.”

“I’ll talk to her and try to get her to at least come over and look at the house,” Ron replied.

“I’ll get David to pop the lock for you,” Gary said.

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Gary went to talk to Darlene. If Ron and Linda wanted to move into the house on the corner, he asked, could Darlene arrange for some help for them to move? No sweat she said as long as Gary would cover the costs of gasoline. He told her no problem and then went over to Chris and Patti’s.

“How you holding out?” Gary asked.

“Well, I’m getting low on gas again, and it doesn’t look like I’m going to have any income for a while, so how would you expect I’m holding out?” Chris said dejectedly.

“Ron has about the same problem you do and I was able to help him out a little Chris, how about I help you a little, too?” Gary commented.

“What did you have in mind?” Chris asked.

“Straightforward loan of a little money so you can get the gas and food that you guys need,” Gary said, “I’ll add it to what you owe me for the guns and you can pay me back when you get back to work.”

“Gee, I don’t know, I owe you a lot for the guns,” Chris said.

“When this is all over, I buy them from you at what they are going for at the time and deduct that from what you owe me,” Gary offered.

“Well, ok,” Chris said, obviously reluctant to get further in debt.

Gary handed Chris an envelope and walked off. Chris opened the envelope and counted the money. It was 50 \$20 bills, the same as Gary had given Ron. That was about as far as Gary’s generosity was going to stretch. Ron was his best friend and Gary had been Chris’s crew chief on the racing team at one time many years before. Gary wasn’t sure how much money was still in Wells Fargo, probably around \$8,000 or maybe

\$13,000, but they were going to need that money to get through this mess. There hadn't been any trouble, yet but Gary sort of figured that with all of those refugees, that wasn't going to last much longer.

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19Feb05...

"Gary, get up," Sharon called, "Ron and Linda are here."

Gary didn't appreciate being awakened, he was dreaming about some redhead named Stacy up in Wyoming. She was one hell of a lot hotter in his dream than in the story he'd written about her. He was just starting to get somewhere with her when Sharon had shouted at him. He guessed he never know if she were a real redhead or not. He went to the bathroom and then put his robe on. He stumbled to the kitchen for the caffeine half of his morning wakeup.

"Morning," Gary greeted Ron and Linda.

Sharon handed Gary a cup of coffee and he stumbled back down the hall to the office with Ron trailing behind. Gary sat his cup on the computer table, lit a cigarette and took a sip of coffee.

"Can I speak now?" Ron laughed.

"What's up?" Gary asked.

"We looked at the house," Ron said, "If it weren't for the security concerns, we'd pass, but there's safety in numbers, so I guess we'll move."

"I talked to what's-her-name and she said if I bought the gas, a lot of the neighbor's would help you move," Gary managed to get out.

"How long does it take you to wake up in the morning?" Ron asked.

"An hour, more or less," Gary laughed, "I'll have you know you ruined a perfectly good dream about a redhead."

"Been there, done that," Ron said, "They're no different than any other woman."

"It would have been nice to find out for myself," Gary mused. "Anyway, I talked to Darlene. And, I gave Chris some money to help them out. After I get awake, would you drive me to the branch?"

"If I live that long," Ron laughed.

Gary finished his cigarette and poured himself into the shower. If he had bothered to turn on the light, and found the power off, he might have realized that there was nothing but cold water. He was awake in a hurry. He got dressed, strapped on the Ruger, and then remembered they were going to the branch and took the gun back off. He'd forgotten to call the branch, but they had money to cover his withdrawal. He took the money and got back in the car. It wasn't until then that he noticed National Guard vehicles parked all over the place.

"It looks like the Cavalry has arrived," Gary said.

"Just in time, too," Ron replied. "You may not realize it but the Antelope Valley is wall-to-wall people. I think we're in for a real crap storm."

"Then we'd better get our butts in gear and get you moved to Moon Shadows," Gary said.

"Lyn already went to see Darlene, Gar-Bear," Ron said, "They're probably half done."

Not hardly, but by evening, everything was moved, including Ron's two propane tanks. Gary had paid AmeriGas and Ron was busy helping Linda clean up the house and getting them settled in. Dick had wired in Ron's generator and ran lines to Chris and Patti's and to his house. The two homes flanked Ron and Linda's new home. Chris got the 4 gas cans refilled (at \$4 a gallon) and returned them to Gary. He told Darlene that she was welcome to use the generator, but she had to come up with her own gas and cans. Gary walked down to Ron and Linda's new home and knocked on the door.

"How's it going?" Gary asked Ron when he answered the door.

"I'll be up all night getting everything squared away," Ron complained.

"I'd offer to help you out," Gary laughed, "But I don't know which way you came in."

"Gar-Bear, that joke's older than you are," Ron said. "Actually, I'm about done. I'll call the phone company tomorrow and see if they can transfer my phone service."

Preparations – Chapter 10 – Gunfire

Actually, Gary was feeling a lot better now that Ron and Linda were in the tract. He hoped Ron had some good luck getting his phone transferred. If they just had to change some setting in the office, Ron would probably be ok. Otherwise, it could take forever, he speculated. It was the same prefix, 285, so maybe Ron would be in luck. Gary wasn't very hungry that night and had picked at his dinner. Now, however, he was hungry, but there weren't any leftovers. He took his pills and insulin and went to see what he could bring up on the Internet. There still wasn't any long distance service, so Gary sent Derek an email. There weren't a hell of a lot of websites up either. With his pills kicking in, Gary called it a night.

20Feb05...

It was 8:45am and Gary was sitting in front of the computer trying to wake up. He checked his email and had no messages. That should mean something to him, but it escaped him for the moment. He was dying to get more news about what was going on around the country and decided to try the Des Moines Register's website. The browser seemed to hang for a minute and then the website came up. Halleluiah! The front page had a picture of some tanks parked in front of the Capitol Building in Des Moines. Even with his 21" monitor, the picture was too small to make out, but when he read the caption... SSgt Derek Olsen and his crew are one of a dozen tanks assigned to guard the Capitol Complex...

"Sharon, Derek made the front page of the Des Moines Register," Gary shouted.

Sharon came into the office carrying a cup of coffee for Gary.

"What did he do to make the front page?" Sharon asked.

"Nothing important; that's not the point," Gary said, "At least we know where he is and that he is ok. It says 'SSgt Derek Olsen and his crew' so I guess he got the promotion and his own tank."

"That's nice dear," Sharon said and returned to the kitchen.

Gary could never understand Sharon's attitude towards his two sons. It seemed to him that he tried a hell of a lot harder to be nice to Lorrie than she did to Damon and Derek. Theirs was one of those hers, mine and ours marriages that mixed the offspring from both their first marriages with a child of their own. Oh well. He finished his smoke and got a shower before the water got too cold. Things seemed to be stabilizing and maybe they should consider running the generator longer. Propane didn't seem to be a problem, so far, even feeding electricity to three homes. Of course they tried not to run the generator during daylight hours. He guessed he should have had AmeriGas top off his tank when they put in Ron's but he'd forgotten.

Gary was dressed and back at his computer desk when Ron walked up to his window.

"You want to go to the bank?" Ron asked.

"I suppose I'd better Ron," Gary said, "I'll be with you in a minute."

Gary got his Winchester and walked out the garage door.

"What's with the hardware?" Ron asked, "You usually leave it at home when we go to the bank."

"I don't know Ron," Gary said, "It just feels right somehow. I saw Derek's picture on the front page of the Des Moines Register this morning."

"What's he doing?" Ron asked.

"He and his crew are guarding the Iowa Capitol. He got promoted to SSgt and got his own tank," Gary replied.

"At least they didn't send him to Chicago," Ron observed.

"Or Iraq," Gary said.

"Let's shake a leg, I've got to be at Stater Brothers at 11am," Ron said. "I thought the President ordered all US forces home?"

"He did, but that will take quite a while," Gary said. "You know, I should have made sure that Clarence and Lucy signed up for food and Amy and Lorrie did too."

"Clarence already did Gar-Bear," Ron said, "And the girls are welcome to ride along with us when we go to the store."

"Ok, thanks," Gary replied. "Would you look at all of the National Guard troops?"

"I guess that Arnold finally got his butt in gear," Ron said, "But you'd think they be at the refugee camps than all over Palmdale."

"If there are as many refugees as you said yesterday, they are probably just guarding Palmdale," Gary suggested.

"How much do you have left in the bank, if I may ask?" Ron said.

"About \$8,300 I think," Gary said, "We can get \$5,000 today and the rest tomorrow."

"No we can't," Ron said, "Today is Sunday. Sorry Gar-Bear."

"We're almost there Ron," Gary said, "Let's go the rest of the way. Who knows, they might be open today because of the emergency."

Good guess, Gary. Gary unstrapped the Ruger and went into the branch. He was back out in 10 minutes with another \$5,000.

"That leaves me \$3,347.06 in the bank Ron," he said, "We'll pull \$3,000 tomorrow and leave the \$347 to keep the account open."

"When we get home, you send the girls down partner," Ron instructed.

Gary had quite an assortment of money in his file cabinet. That one day, he'd gotten all twenties, but had passed 100 of them off. Another day, he'd gotten all fifties. The other times, he'd gotten hundreds. He had to take the tray out of his cash box to hold the money and kept the locked box in his locked filing cabinet. He wished he had a safe, but that would have probably just advertised the fact that he had some cash on hand. With the prices of everything, hundreds were probably the best bet. Which, for some reason, reminded him that he should get more wood. He called the guy in Littlerock and asked him to bring over 4 cords for the fireplaces. The price was up to \$350 a cord plus delivery. Somehow, that didn't surprise Gary a bit.

o

Late in the afternoon, the National Guard came by. They cautioned the folks at the barricade that there had been a 'little altercation' at one of the refugee camps and suggested that the tract post extra guards. Darlene spread the word and Gary walked down to Ron's to see if he'd gotten the word. Ron was up on the roof installing the Wilson antenna for the CB. Gary rang the bell and Linda let him in. She poured him a cup of coffee and they were visiting when Ron came into the kitchen.

"Hey partner, what's up?" Ron asked.

"The National Guard was just by and said there was a quote little altercation close quote at one of the refugee camps," Gary related.

"So, it's beginning, huh?" Ron said, "I figured it was just a matter of time."

"Got the CB antenna up?" Gary asked.

"Yeah, I'll give you a call in a while to make sure it's ok," Ron replied.

"Would it be ok if I camped out in your bonus room in the garage tonight?" Gary asked.

"Yeah, have a fight with Sharon?" Ron kidded.

"No, your bonus room has a view of the entrance to the tract, the same as Chris's gar-

age,” Gary said, “But it’s a whole lot warmer. I’d just like to keep a watch on the front of the tract.”

“Do you really think we’ll have trouble tonight?” Linda asked.

“I don’t know Linda, but I rather be safe than sorry,” Gary replied.

“Ronald,” Linda said sharply.

“I guess I’ll be joining you Gar-Bear, the boss has spoken,” Ron winked.

Around 9pm, Gary returned to Ron and Linda’s with his Winchester, Ruger, M1A and a knapsack. The knapsack was filled with extra stripper clips of the 7.62x51mm ammo and several boxes of .45 Colt ammo. Gary was wearing his harness with its 4 magazine pouches and there was already a mag in the M1A.

“I wish I’d bought more magazines for the M1A,” Gary said.

“Gar-Bear if you use those 9 mags, we’ll be up to our butts in alligators,” Ron said, “Besides, you have those stripper clips.”

“I suppose you’re right,” Gary said, “But it takes a hell of a lot longer to fill a mag than it does to empty one.”

“Maybe,” Ron said, “But I’d bet you’d be surprised how fast you can load those mags if your adrenalin is pumping.”

Gary wished he had some night vision binoculars or a night vision scope, add that to the list of things he should have had before the balloon went up. They removed the screen from the window in Ron’s bonus room in case they had to shoot at anyone. Gary had skipped his Xanax on this night and he was wide-awake. The extra strong coffee Ron was brewing gave him the hives, though, and he took 2 Benadryl capsules. Most people would fall asleep in minutes with 100 mg of Benadryl in their system, but Gary had taken so much of the stuff trying to get off Xanax, it barely fazed him. Most over-the-counter sleeping pills were Benadryl. That’s why they became ineffective so quickly. People tended to develop a tolerance to the drowsiness that Benadryl produced if they took the drug over an extended period.

Around 4am, Ron left to make another pot of battery acid. Gary must have faded for a moment because he was startled when shots rang out near the entrance to the tract. He was wide-awake now but couldn’t see anything in the dark. The absence of the streetlights was very apparent now. Gary could see some of the people at the entrance returning fire, but he couldn’t see whom they were shooting at.

“Do you think that we should go up there and lend them a hand?” Ron asked.

“No, a couple of old men like us would just be in the way,” Gary said, “Let’s just stay here as backup for those people.”

“How the hell are the people shooting at the tract seeing who or what to shoot at?” Ron asked.

“You’ve got me,” Gary said, “The snow is gone and the moon isn’t that bright, so maybe they have some night vision equipment.”

“Where would a bunch of refugees get night vision equipment?” Ron challenged, “I doubt that they are refugees if you’re right about night vision.”

“Well, the shooting has stopped,” Gary said, “So maybe whoever it has left.”

“Are you familiar with the term ‘reconnaissance by fire’,” Ron asked.

“More or less, why?” Gary asked.

“We might need to make some changes at the entrance come daylight,” Ron suggested.

“Like what?” Gary asked.

“Like fighting positions, you know, foxholes,” Ron said.

“Maybe we should have bought a few cans of fast burning powder like Bullseye at the gun store,” Gary suggested. “We could have made some pipe bombs.”

“Add that to your list of things to do when you prepare for the next terrorist attack,” Ron laughed. “That list must be getting pretty long.”

“It has a few things on it partner,” Gary said, “But, given the money we had to spend and everything, we did pretty well.”

“We did, didn’t we,” Ron agreed. “We can always get the Bullseye, but who would sell us pipes and caps at this stage of the game?”

“And fuse,” Gary said. “I heard someone say the other day that you can never be perfectly prepared for all situations. He said that preparedness is more a state of mind.”

“He’s probably right too,” Ron said, “You could have all of the preparations in the world, but if you weren’t prepared to make use of what you had, it wouldn’t make much difference. That M1A is a nice rifle, but if you won’t pull the trigger, it’s nothing more than an awkward club. Why did you put a flashhider on it with a bayonet lug?”

“I don’t know,” Gary admitted, “Probably just to po Arnold.”

Preparations – Chapter 11 – Hurry Up & Wait

21Feb05...

It had turned to the 21st while they sat there that night. There had been no more gunfire and around 6am, Ron took a gallon of his battery acid, er, coffee, to the folks up at the entrance.

“Where was that fire coming from last night?” Ron asked.

“Across the street, over near the other housing tract,” Dick said.

“Could you see who it was?” Ron asked.

“Not really,” Dick said, “It was just a bunch of muzzle flashes.”

“I never was in the military Dick, so I don’t know this for a fact,” Ron said, “But, if it was me, I’d put in some fox holes a ways back from the entrance. You guys all bunching up like you were last night really made you stand out and some person with a good sniper rifle or automatic weapon could have taken you all out in a New York minute.”

“Where were you last night?” Dick asked.

“Gar-Bear and I were sitting in my bonus room last night, sort of backing you folks up. We’re kind of old for this guard duty crap, but we had your back,” Ron said. “Oh by the way, thanks for installing my generator.”

“No problem, it was nice to have lights for a while,” Dick said. “You know that I ran a line to Chris and Patti and one to my house, don’t you?”

“I saw the extension cords,” Ron said. “It’s no problem, but I don’t run that generator 24/7 because I have to conserve a little.”

“You know that I work for the gas company, right?” Dick asked.

“Yeah, but that’s more like used to work for the gas company, right?” Ron commented.

“The gas will be back online in another 10 days or so,” Dick said. “The estimates were 2 weeks to make the repairs and the last I checked, they were ahead of schedule.”

“That’s good to hear,” Ron said, “If we’re getting gas back that soon, I’ll run the generator a little longer each day. Have you heard anything about the lights?”

“Actually, those terrorists only took out a few substations here in California according to my friends over at Edison,” Dick said. “Edison is making the same estimate to get the substations back up. However, they are going to have to isolate California from the na-

tional grid. We'll be ok until it gets warm but then the instate system won't handle the load. The Governor is going to have to figure out some sort of controls on usage once it gets warm."

"Let's hope for a late spring and summer," Ron replied. "You look into those changes I suggested; I think that Gary and I could use some sleep."

o

It was a 'short night' for Ron and Gary. They got about 5 hours of sleep and were up around noon. Ron came by and picked up Gary for the last trip to the bank. Gary pulled the last \$3,000 from his account and while they were there, walked over to the Sheriff's Station.

"We had some gunfire at our housing tract last night," Gary told the Deputy.

"Where do you live and what time did it happen?" the Deputy asked.

"We live in the Moon Shadows tract on Avenue R between Grecian Isles and 47th East," Gary replied. "The guards at the entrance of the tract took some fire just after 4am."

"And you are?" the Deputy asked.

"My name is Gary Olsen, I live there," Gary said.

"Was anybody hurt?" the Deputy asked continuing to fill out the report he was making.

"Not this time," Gary said. "How's about you folks run a car by there about once or twice an hour during the night?"

"Mr. Olsen, we can't spare the manpower," the Deputy said, "But, I'll pass it along to those National Guard folks; maybe they can make a few random passes."

"What was this crap about a 'little altercation'?" Ron asked. "The National Guard boys were around warning us yesterday afternoon."

"We have a real problem guys," the Deputy said. "The normal population of the Valley is just under 400 thousand people. We have about 600,000 refugees from LA. "They're spread out between Palmdale and Lancaster and north of Lancaster. The Guard brought in tents and is trying to supply food, but they're way behind the curve with everything. And, they're open camps, so there's nothing really to keep the people from moving whenever they please. We've tried to segregate the folks and that worked for about a day. Then it all just went to hell."

"Well thanks for the information," Gary said, "Let's go Ron."

Once in the car and headed back to the tract, Ron said, "Jeez, that doesn't sound very good Gary."

"I agree Ron," Gary said "The tract has open ground to the east, west and north; it butts up against another tract on the south. Anyway, that leaves us exposed on 3 sides. They're going to have to do something different to protect the tract. I'll mention it to Chris and he can talk to Darlene."

"I could call 'her' and see if we could get some Bullseye," Ron suggested.

"Call her if you want, but I don't want any Bullseye, that was a bad idea," Gary said, "But I would like to get some things from her if she has them."

"Like what?" Ron asked.

"More mags for my rifles, maybe some night optics and a suppressor if she has one," Gary said.

"Why a suppressor?" Ron asked.

"I was reading an article last year in one of the gun mags about a new .30 caliber suppressor," Gary explained. A flashhider doesn't really hide the flash, but those new suppressors do. Anyway, some outfit in Fountain Valley came out with a new suppressor a year ago for .30 caliber rifles. According to the article I read, the rifle is no louder than an air rifle and there is no muzzle flash."

"She isn't a class III dealer, you know," Ron said.

"Some of the stuff she had at her house was illegal, even for a class III dealer Ronald," Gary said, "So I don't believe that has any bearing on the matter."

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Later that day...

"Well, I called her Gar-Bear," Ron said, "She'll see us right now at her home."

"Good, did you asked her about what I wanted?" Gary asked.

"On an open line? Are you nuts?" Ron said. "Hell yes, you're nuts, I decided that a long time ago."

"I'm taking my M1A with me," Gary said, "If she has what I want, it may need to be fitted."

“What can I do for you boys today,” she asked.

“Do you have any M-14 magazines?” Gary asked.

“USGI surplus 20 round mags are \$50,” she said.

“I’d like 10,” Gary said, “Have you ever heard of a Surefire suppressor?”

“Yes...” she replied.

“I don’t suppose you’d know where I could get one and have it installed on my Loaded M1A, do you?” Gary asked.

“Suppose I could,” she said, “Do you have any idea of how much money you’re talking about?”

“Not really,” Gary said, “How much?”

“If I could get such a thing, it would cost you \$1,800 installed on your rifle,” she said, “That’s with the fast attach mount... supposing that I could get one.”

“And if you could, hypothetically, get such a thing,” Gary said, “When would a guy get his rifle back?”

“Same time tomorrow,” she smiled.

“I was wondering if you could check out my M1A and add any missing equipment.” Gary said, “Do you have any subsonic 7.62x51?”

“\$500 a case of 500 rounds,” she replied. “I don’t recommend it and I suppose I could bring your M1A up to specs, do you have the \$1,800?”

“Do you have any night optics?” Gary countered.

“Oh, you want a complete refit, huh?” she said. “I might have a Gen I+ riflescope with infrared for say \$700. If you want some binoculars too, add another \$300.”

“So \$2,800 for the lot and I’d get my upgraded rifle back tomorrow?” Gary summarized.

“Fully upgraded and sighted in,” she said.

Gary still had the \$3,000 he’d gotten from the bank in his front pocket. He took the money out and slowly counted it out for her. He sent Ron to the car to get the M1A. She picked up the money, took the rifle and went into her bedroom. She emerged a minute later with a box containing 10 USGI M-14 magazines and the binoculars.

“See you boys tomorrow,” she said.

Ron and Gary put the purchases in Ron’s trunk and got into the car to return to the housing tract. About halfway back, Ron finally spoke up.

“You really are nuts, Gar-Bear,” Ron said. “You’re 100% certifiable.”

“Why?” Gary said. “Think about it Ron, all of this stuff is off the books. There was no sales tax or federal transfer tax or waiting. I only paid about \$100 extra for the suppressor. And some places were charging \$50 apiece for the magazines last year before TSHTF and couldn’t/wouldn’t ship to California. She didn’t gouge me one bit, under the circumstances.”

“You probably should have bought more surplus 7.62x51 from her,” Ron said.

“We can get that tomorrow, partner,” Gary said.

o

When they got back to the housing tract, they noticed that someone had knocked out a chunk of sidewalk just outside of the perimeter fence and put in a foxhole. There were also foxholes dug in two of the lawns just south of the Northstar intersection, about 50 yards from the entrance. Apparently, Dick had passed along Ron’s advice or just gone ahead and implemented it. After they unloaded the car, Gary walked back to the entrance. He handed Dick the night vision binoculars.

“I picked those up today Dick,” Gary said. “Why don’t you folks give them a try tonight and let me know if they’re any good?”

“What is this?” Dick asked.

“They’re UNITEC-BNV3 Night Vision Binoculars,” Gary said. “They’re made in Russia so I have no idea how good they are. According to the literature in the package, they’re good out to about 300 meters.”

“Are Ron and you going to stay up tonight and back us up?” Dick asked.

“I don’t think so, we’re both pretty tired,” Gary said. “Besides, I put my M1A in the shop today to have some upgrades installed so I wouldn’t have any real firepower to back you up with. Ron and I talked to the Sheriff’s Department today and reported the incident last night. The Deputy said he’d pass it along to the National Guard and see if they could make a few random passes past the tract during the night. Did you realize that there are more refugees in the AV than there are residents?”

Preparations – Chapter 12 – Family Matters

22Feb05...

Gary had taken his meds and hit the hay around 10pm the night before. He hadn't realized how tired he was until he sat down in his recliner around 8 after he'd done the meds. Sharon woke him up at 10pm and sent him to bed. With the girls signed up for food at Stater Brothers, any shortages they might have should be covered as long as the store could get deliveries. He told Sharon to just run the generator 24/7, because Dick had told Ron that the gas would be back on in about 10 days.

Gary woke up about 8am and wasn't as groggy as usual. He got his coffee and headed to the office for his first cigarette. Just for the hell of it, he checked his email. He had a message from Derek! That was what he'd been trying to remember, he'd sent Derek an email and it didn't bounce.

"Went to CC on 15th. Matt dist 25k ea to bro, u and me. U also get 5k/mo next 5 mo. We ok. Bro urway w/ Harley. P/u 2 ar & 2 m9 - buddy conv ar to USGI specs. Also 2 fal. Fd no prob. All ok.

SSGT DEREK OLSEN, TANK COMMANDER"

So, the bank had sent \$25k and was sending another \$25k over the next 5 months. Damon was apparently coming to Palmdale on his motorcycle and Derek and Mary had 2 M16A2's, 2 M-9's and 2 FAL rifles. They had plenty to eat and were ok. Gary sent a reply:

"p/u 2 1911-m9 junk. eye open for D. we ok. TOM"

Now if Derek would just listen and get some real pistols, they should be ok. Gary didn't much like the idea of Damon driving 2,400 miles across country on that Harley, but Damon wouldn't have listened if he could have talked to him anyway, so he planned to tell Darlene to add Damon's name to the list of people to be admitted to the tract. That was a nice way to start the day! Gary had some breakfast and headed to Ron's. When he got there, Clarence was sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee and visiting with Ron.

"Gary!" Clarence said, "Where have you been hiding out?"

"Under a rock Clarence," Gary laughed, "With the rest of my friends."

"It's good you can keep your sense of humor," Clarence said.

"Had some good news this morning, guys," Gary said, "Got an email from Derek. The bank is sending more money each month for the next 5 months. They're ok and Damon is on the way here."

“Do you think it’s a good idea for Damon to come to California?” Ron asked.

“No, but he listens to me about as well as Kevin does to you, so it wouldn’t do any good to tell him not to come if I could get a hold of him,” Gary replied.

“You know, we’ve got quite a pile of garbage built up,” Clarence said, “We need to haul it somewhere and burn it or something.”

“I hadn’t thought about that, but you’re right Clarence,” Gary said. “I suppose we could haul it across the street to that open field and burn it.”

“Or, just dump it,” Ron suggested.

“I’ll ask Darlene to call the Sheriff’s Department and find out what they’d prefer we do with it,” Gary suggested. “Since it appears that I have more money coming in, I think I may spend a little more with our friend, Ron.”

“What now?” Ron asked.

“Maybe a can for the Mini-14,” Gary said.

“Do you take crazy pills every morning, partner?” Ron laughed.

“Only on the odd days,” Gary grinned.

“What are the two of you talking about?” Clarence asked.

“Putting a silencer on my 5.56×45 rifle Clarence,” Gary explained.

“Why would you want to do that?” Clarence quizzed.

“To hide the muzzle flash Clarence,” Gary said, “It’s pretty hard for someone to shoot at you if they don’t have a muzzle flash to zero in on.”

“Are you expecting trouble?” Clarence asked.

“Clarence, it’s not so much a question of if as when,” Ron said. “We had gunfire the night before last.”

“Maybe we ought to travel in groups from now on,” Clarence suggested.

“That might not be a bad idea,” Ron agreed.

“I’m going to check with Dick and see if those Russian binoculars worked,” Gary said, “And have a word with Darlene about the trash. How about we get together here around 3 this afternoon?”

They agreed and Gary left to talk to Dick and Darlene. The binoculars weren't the best, Dick said, but they would do. Darlene agreed to call her ex at the Sheriff's Department and find out what to do about the trash. Gary went back to the house and tried to take a nap, asking Sharon to wake him if he wasn't up by 2:30. The next thing he knew, Sharon was poking his foot.

"It's 2:30 Gary," she said.

"Uh, thanks, babe," Gary said, "Say, I'm going to see about putting a silencer on the Mini-14 and maybe picking up another rifle."

"Just don't run us short of cash," Sharon cautioned.

"I won't," Gary said, "By the way, the bank will be sending us \$5,000 a month for the next 5 months."

"When did you find that out?" Sharon asked.

"Got an email from Derek this morning," Gary explained. "They're ok and Damon is on the way out here."

"Lovely," Sharon said, not unkindly.

Darlene said that the Deputy said that trash collections would resume next week, they'd just have to hang on to the trash until then. Gary got to Ron's just before 3pm with that bit of news. Gary had counted out half of the cash he had on hand to take with him to the gal's house. The three men visited for a while and it was soon time to head out to pick up his M1A. Clarence asked if he could ride along and the three of them headed out.

"Gentlemen," she said. "Here's your rifle, Gary, I hope that it meets with your satisfaction."

Gary checked the rifle over. It had the Surefire suppressor and a UNITEC-117 Russian night scope on it. She showed him how add or remove the suppressor. It looked pretty good to him.

"Would you have a can for my Mini-14?" Gary asked.

"\$1,750 installed," she replied.

"What about another M1A?" he asked.

"All I have is a Loaded standard with a carbon barrel and a synthetic stock," she said, "\$2,000."

“With suppressor?” Gary asked.

“\$3,000,” she replied.

“Night vision?” Gary continued.

“You can choose between a UNITEC-GS37 or a UNITEC-GS18,” she said, “\$4,500 or \$1,500 extra.”

“So, \$4,500 for the rifle with the can and the GS-18?” Gary asked. “What about subsonic 5.56x45 ammo?”

“I have some, but it’s not worth the price,” she said, “Just stick with the government surplus.”

“Magazines for the M1A?” Gary asked.

“I’ll throw in 5 20-round magazines,” she said.

“I’ll need some more 7.62x51mm surplus ammo,” Gary said.

“\$200 per 800-round case,” she said.

“Ok, I’ll take the can for the Mini-14, the rifle with the GS-18 and suppressor, 3 extra mags and 3 cases of 7.62x51,” Gary replied.

“\$7,000 even,” she said, “Did you bring the Mini-14?”

“It’s in the car,” Gary said, “Ron if you want to get it for me, I’ll pay the lady. How long do I have to wait on the M1A?”

“Is 2 minutes too long?” she asked.

Gary counted out the \$6,000. That left him just under \$1,000 in his pocket and just under \$6,000 at home. But, if the bank were going to send \$5k a month for a while, they’d be ok. Ron gave her the Mini-14 and Clarence said, “My turn.”

“What can I do for you?” she asked.

“You wouldn’t happen to have a FAL rifle would you?” Clarence inquired.

“California legal or illegal?” she asked.

“What’s the difference?” Clarence wanted to know.

“The CA legal has a 10 round fixed mag that you fill with stripper clips, she said. “The illegal uses detachable magazines.”

“How much for the illegal?” Clarence asked.

“The one I have, outfitted like it would be \$2,000,” she said, “But the mags are only \$10 apiece.”

“Ok, I’ll take the rifle, 2 cases of ammo and 10 magazines,” Clarence said.

“\$2,500,” she answered.

Clarence counted out the money. Gary noticed that Clarence was putting the money down very slowly, almost as if it was hurting him. He pulled the cash he had left in his pocket out and handed it to Clarence.

“I’ve helped everyone but you, pal. But this is all I have with me at the moment,” Gary said.

“You don’t have to do that Gary,” Clarence said.

“Ron, give Clarence another \$100, I’ll pay you back later,” Gary said.

That made the advance to Clarence an even thousand. Gary could see the relief in Clarence’s face and was happy he’d been able to help out. They were all pretty well equipped in the gun department now although Ron was a little underpowered as far as he was concerned. Ron didn’t have a rifle bigger than 5.56×45mm caliber, but Gary guessed that was Ron’s choice. Damon was on the way to California and he did have his share of the money that the bank had distributed. They should be ok for now financially. The main thing was just to stay alive until those refugees started to return to the San Fernando Valley.

According to KTPI, the feds had arrested some more of the terrorists. The south central police region was a total disaster, so it didn’t appear that there was much to fear from the gangs in that part of the city. The gangs over in the eastern part of the city had bugged out and no one knew where they were. Maybe they had gone to San Bernardino, but, when you thought about it, that was unlikely because the cloud of radioactive waste would have gone right over the inland empire and those thugs were smarter than to go where the radiation was liable to fall. So far, the feds had limited rescue work in the 6 cities to brief over flights and some activity on the city borders. The radio said the feds were planning on waiting the full 2 weeks before they moved in full force. That would be February 28th or March 1st.

Preparations – Chapter 13 – Food Riots

When they got home, Gary got \$100 from his file cabinet and took it to Ron.

“That was nice of you to help out Clarence,” Ron commented.

“It was no big deal,” Gary said, “You know, Tony got him good and I always felt guilty about that.”

“That wasn’t your responsibly Gar-Bear, the SOB got you for 10 grand,” Ron scoffed.

“I know, but I guess I should have warned Clarence not to loan money to him,” Gary said. “Anyway Tony was probably in downtown LA when the bomb went off in some tavern conning someone else.”

“If he was, he got what he deserved,” Ron laughed. “It’s people like Tony who give Jews a bad name. He was always walking around flaunting the fact that he was Jewish, but he didn’t keep kosher and he was a despicable human being.”

“I’m done buying guns and accessories, but I’m a little concerned that you don’t have anything bigger than a 5.56×45, partner,” Gary said.

Ron got up, walked to the closet and pulled out a rifle. He handed it to Gary.

“When did you get this?” Gary asked.

“Around the time I put in the generator,” Ron said, “Do you approve?”

“What’s not to approve? What model is it exactly?” Gary asked.

“That, my friend is a Super Match M1A with a McMillan Marine Corps camo fiberglass stock and a Douglas stainless steel barrel,” Ron said.

“Did you get any high capacity magazines?” Gary asked.

“I have two daughters in Arkansas, what do you think?” Ron smiled.

“How many did you get?” Gary asked.

“15,” Ron said, “They ran across some at a gun show fairly cheap and bought what they had money for. And, before you ask, I have 5 cases of that Aussie surplus ammo.”

“How come you never said anything? And why did you give me a hard time over wanting more mags for my M1A?” Gary asked.

“To quote your least favorite President,” Ron laughed, “Because I could.”

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23Feb05...

Gary was reading the Des Moines Register on the net when the CB let loose with some excited sounding traffic. He turned up the volume to hear what was being said. Apparently the National Guard had been by the tract and something was up. He quickly dressed, strapped on the Ruger and grabbed the Winchester. On the way out the door, he hollered to Sharon that he was going to Ron's and grabbed a CB portable sitting on the end table. Clarence was out front on his way to Ron's. He had his new FAL and magazines were sticking out of all of his pockets. Gary had an extra harness and belt and several magazine pouches in the garage; he'd have to remember to give Clarence some LBE.

"Did you get what all the chatter was about Clarence?" Gary asked.

"Nope. Just something about the National Guard being at the entrance and that there was trouble," Clarence said. "Maybe Ron got the straight scoop."

By the time they got to Ron's, he was standing on the front porch with his M1A, load-bearing equipment with several magazine pouches and what looked to be a M1911 holster.

"I didn't know you had a .45 auto," Gary said.

"I don't, it's a .357 revolver," Ron said, "But the holster works, so why not use it?"

"What kind of .357?" Gary asked.

"It's a Colt Python, why?" Ron replied.

"I have 8 speed loaders for a Colt Python in my gun junk box," Gary said, "Stop by and pick them up."

"Got any of those carriers?" Ron asked.

"No, but she had them at the gun store, so ask her when we go to pick up the Mini-14 tonight," Gary suggested.

By this time, the three of them had arrived at the front of the tract. Dick was standing there so Gary went to ask what was up.

"They had a food riot at one of the refugee camps," Dick reported.

"Did they run out of food?" Ron asked.

“No. The Guard has been feeding them MRE’s, if I understood right,” Dick smirked. “Apparently some butthead made a stink because he got a meal with pork in it.”

“I thought you said Tony was dead,” Ron said.

“I said Tony was probably in downtown LA when the bomb went off in some tavern conning someone else,” Gary laughed. “Maybe I was wrong.”

“What the hell are you two talking about?” Dick asked.

“A guy the three of us knew. A real con man,” Ron explained. “He got Clarence and Gary and a whole lot of people for money before Gary cut him off and threw him out. Anyway, this is just the type of stunt the guy would pull.”

“Is he Jewish?” Dick asked.

“Only by birth,” Gary said. “Sure ate a lot of bacon and pork chops while they were living with us. Ron’s right though, Tony could charm a crowd into having a riot over people handing out money. His favorite stunt was getting you to cash a check for him. I’ll bet he hung paper on a couple of dozen people. I have 3 of them myself.”

“So, what’s the situation Dick?” Clarence asked.

“The people in that camp are spreading out over the Valley,” Dick said. “The Guard is trying to round them up, but there are just too many of them. The Lieutenant said that if they tried to break into the tract to shoot them.”

“You’d better get someone to get the word out,” Gary suggested, “The message we got over the CB wasn’t very clear. If anyone does show up, try firing one shot over his or her head, first. If that doesn’t work, I agree with the Lieutenant.”

“I thought that the LAPD didn’t fire warning shots,” Ron said.

“They don’t, but we’re not the LAPD,” Gary said. “Besides, we should have plenty of time; we have the block walls and everything.”

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Gary decided that he’d better put away the cowboy guns and get his MBR and PT1911. He told Ron and Clarence to come to his place and he’d give them some stuff they could use. He gave Ron the 8 speed loaders and gave Clarence a spare web belt, harness and 4 magazine pouches. He quickly loaded 13 of the magazines and put 12 on his LBE. “Darn,” he thought, “That’s heavy; no wonder they went to the 5.56x45.” He took the night vision scope off the rifle and put it in the Alice pack together with one blister pack of the surplus ammo, one MRE and 4 bottles of water. He grabbed a folding

chair and headed back to the entrance. If they had a chance to pick up the Mini-14 today, he was going to spring for 3 more sets of the night vision binoculars, if she had them. He'd meant to do it the last couple of times he'd been to her house, but it had completely slipped his mind.

Clarence was waiting for him.

"Do you want a folding chair?" Gary asked.

"Might be a good idea," Clarence said.

"If you can handle 2, grab one for Ronald," Gary suggested. "Hey, what kind of .38 is that, a Chief's Special?"

"Yeah why?" Clarence asked.

"I'll catch up to you at Ron's," Gary said. He went to his junk box and pulled out 2 speed loaders for the Chief's Special he used to have and stuck them in his pocket.

He joined Clarence at Ron's and they walked down to the entrance.

"Here you go Clarence," Gary said pulling the speed loaders out of his pocket. "Only had 2, but they should help out some."

"You have anything else in that junk box of yours?" Ron asked, "Like a few hand grenades or something?"

"I wish," Gary laughed.

They set up their chairs with the backs to the front wall. If it got down to defending the tract, Ron and Gary would have to stand on the chairs, they were only 5'5" tall and it was a 6' wall. Gary looked at the rifle Ron was carrying. To be honest, he wished he had that rifle and Ron had a feather up his butt. Then they'd both be tickled. "As long as I'm doing clichés," he thought, "Wish in one hand and..."

It was pretty cold that day and Dick went down to his house and brought back a small charcoal grill and built a fire in it so they could warm themselves. Around 4pm, nothing had happened and Gary suggested to Ron that they run over to the gal's house to pick up his Mini-14. Give him a minute, too because he wanted to get some cash for more of the binoculars. They took their weapons with them and Clarence rode along, they didn't know what they might run into.

[Now, I don't want anyone to get the wrong idea about this gun dealer. In real life, she is honest as the day is long, but I have to have someone willing to be a little flexible to make this story work.]

When they arrived, she had Gary's rifle ready. Gary asked her if she had any more of those Russian binoculars and she said she had 6 pairs. He laid down the cash for three. Ron and Clarence bought some nylon carriers for their speed loaders and they headed back to the tract. Nothing had happened in their brief absence, so they went to Gary's to have some coffee and warm up. Gary hung one pair of the binoculars around his neck and handed a pair to Ron and a pair to Clarence.

"These are a loan guys, you never know when you might need to be able to see in the dark," he explained.

"Do you have any ideas how many laws were breaking with these guns we have?" Clarence asked.

"Except for the folding stock on my Mini-14 and the fact that the suppressors aren't registered, none," Gary said, "At least, not in most states. But the minute I bought back my Mini-14, I was so far outside of the law that it didn't make a hell of a lot of difference to me anymore."

"Are we going to stand watch tonight?" Ron asked.

"Might not be a bad idea," Gary replied.

"Mind if I join you two?" Clarence asked.

"Do you like battery acid?" Gary asked.

"Huh?" Clarence mumbled.

"The coffee that old Ronald McDonald brews late at night is just short of battery acid," Gary said, "It gave me the hives."

"I'll bring some Pepcid AC," Clarence said. "What time do you get together?"

"Around 9pm Clarence," Ron replied, "I think we'd better use the upstairs bedroom tonight, it will give us a better vantage point. As far as the coffee goes Gar-Bear, if you don't like it, don't drink it."

"You only need to use 3 rounded tablespoons of grounds Ron, not $\frac{3}{4}$ of a cup," Gary retorted.

"Then bring your own coffeepot," Ron said.

"I might just do that," Gary laughed.

Preparations – Chapter 14 – Tony

It was closer to 10pm by the time they all got to Ron's, got two pots of coffee brewing and got settled in the front, east bedroom.

"How far is it to the entrance of the tract?" Clarence asked.

"I paced it today when I had to take Missy for a walk," Gary said, "It's 164 paces from that foxhole on the right side to Ron's garage door. Add 4 more yards for the distance from the door to the window and you have 168. It's 50 yards from the street to the fox-hole, so I guess 218 yards, give or take."

"Is calling it 200 meters close enough?" Clarence asked.

"Hell yeah," Ron said, "It's within 1 meter of being exactly 200 meters."

"Good, this sight is set in meters," Clarence said, "I set it to 200. That's too far to shoot in the dark anyway."

"I'd have let you use my new M1A, Clarence, but I haven't checked to see if it's sighted in yet," Gary half apologized.

"No problem Gary," Clarence said, "These tired old eyes probably wouldn't do much better with a night scope."

"I don't know, it's 3x," Gary replied, "Not all that bad for a cheap night scope."

"Cheap?" Ron said, "You gave \$700 for that scope."

"Ron, a really fancy 3rd gen day/night scope can run as much as \$11,000," Gary said.

"How would you know that?" Ron asked.

"Research for my first story. You know, the one you never finished reading," Gary said.

"I've been busy," Ron protested.

"Doing what, watching Britney Spears on MTV?" Gary teased.

"I've got socks older than Britney Spears," Ron protested.

"Do you two go on like this all the time?" Clarence asked.

"Have you been asleep at the switch Clarence?" Ron said, "We've been this way for 13 years."

“Gary, can I have some of your coffee?” Clarence asked, “This stuff Ron brewed just climbed out of my cup.”

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“I’ve got movement on the other side of the road,” Ron said, “But it’s almost outside the range of these night vision binoculars.”

“Call whoever is on the front gate on a CB,” Gary suggested, “And give them the bearing.”

“Front gate this is Ron Green. You have a bogie at 12 o’clock at about 100 yards,” Ron said.

“10-4,” the guard replied. “Got them, party of about 12.”

“See any weapons?” Ron asked.

“Not at this time,” the guard responded.

“There isn’t enough room for all of us at this window,” Gary complained.

“I’ll go to John’s room,” Ron offered, “Did you bring your handheld?”

“That’s my handheld you’re using,” Gary said, “Yours is next to your coffeepot.”

“Sorry,” Ron said handing Gary the CB.

“There’re more of them,” Clarence announced.

“Front gate, more bogies,” Gary said.

“We see them and they’re armed,” the gate responded.

“We’ve got your back,” Gary replied.

“10-4.”

“Gary, put your riflescope on the tall guy in the center,” Ron said over the radio.

Gary looked. Son-of-a-gun! He couldn’t be absolutely sure in the scope, but he saw what Ron was talking about. The guy was the right height and build that was certain.

“I’m going to the gate,” Gary said over the CB.

“I’m coming, too,” Ron replied.

“What’s up Gary?” Clarence asked.

“The tall guy in the center looks a whole lot like Tony,” Gary said.

“I’m coming, too,” Clarence said. “The SOB ripped me off too you know.”

“I’ll trade you even up anytime, Clarence,” Gary replied.

Ron was already halfway down the stairs and Gary and Clarence hurried to catch up. They covered the 200 meters to the entrance in record time. Sure enough, there that SOB Tony stood.

“Hi guys,” Tony said.

They just glared at Tony.

“I’ve got something for you,” Tony said, pulling off his glove and quickly reaching into his jacket pocket.

BLAM, the three rifles sounded in unison.

“SOB was going for a gun,” somebody said.

“I’ll get the gun out of his pocket,” Gary quickly offered.

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He reached into Tony’s jacket pocket and brought out a gun.

“Should we call the cops?” someone asked.

“What for?” Ron said, “The National Guard told us to shoot them and this guy had a gun. I’d suggest we drag his body over to the field and dump it. If the Sheriff raises hell, Gary can show them the gun he just took out of the guy’s pocket.”

All three of them had fired, two of them because the SOB had ripped them off and one purely out of meanness.

“I’d better check all of his pockets,” Ron said. When he reached into the pocket that Gary had appeared to withdraw the pistol from, he felt what might be some money or a bundle of paper. Ron kept a straight face and searched all of Tony’s pockets finding his wallet and nothing else.

“Gar-Bear, you’d better hang onto this guy’s wallet in case the cops have any questions,” Ron said handing Gary Tony’s wallet. “There is no sense in letting this coat go to

waste. I'll take it home and clean off the blood. Some homeless guy might be able to use it."

"Why don't a couple of you drag the body over to the field?" Gary suggested, "I've got your back."

Tony ended up flat on his dead face, the life drained from him and his pockets empty. The three men walked back to Ron's house and when they got inside, went to the kitchen. Linda had heard the gunshot and had gotten up and moved her coffeepot back to the kitchen. A fresh pot of drinkable coffee was brewing.

"How much did he get you for Clarence?" Ron asked.

"\$180," Clarence replied.

"It's all hundreds. Take 2, they're small," Ron joked, handing Clarence 2 \$100 bills. "Here you go partner, you take the rest. Probably won't cover what the SOB owed you, but it beats a kick in the teeth."

"Gary, why don't you take this \$200 against what I owe you," Clarence said offering the money Ron had given him to Gary.

"Both of your debts are paid in full, courtesy of Tony," Gary said. "I'd written the money off a long time ago guys."

When Gary got home, he took his Xanax and went to the office to count the money. There was \$9,800 in the bundle and \$2,900 in the wallet. Tony had ripped Frankie for \$2,000 and Walt for \$700. He put their money in envelopes with their names on the envelopes and put \$5,000 in his lockbox. He put the other \$5,000 in a blank envelope to give to Sharon in the morning. Before he crawled into bed, he put the Sterling back in its case in his sock drawer.

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24Feb05...

Sharon got Gary around early to go to Stater Brothers with her. After he had a quick shower he joined her in the kitchen where he handed her the envelope with \$5,000 in it.

"What's this?" Sharon asked.

"\$5,000," Gary said. "You'll never guess who showed up at the entrance last night. Your favorite person in the world."

"Tony?" Sharon said realizing that Gary's comment was dripping with sarcasm.

“Yep. Said he had something for us and went for his pocket. Ron, Clarence and I shot him,” Gary explained.

“So what does that have to do with \$5,000?” Sharon asked.

“He wasn’t going for a gun dear,” Gary explained, “He was reaching for a bundle that had \$10,000 in it. Anyway I guessed that he might not have a gun and palmed the Sterling and made it look like he had a gun. There was something in his pocket, but I ignored it. Then, Ron searched him and felt the money, too. He played dumb and we decided to dispose of the body in the field across the road. Ron gave me his wallet on the pretense that I should keep it in case the cops had any questions. He also took Tony’s coat and we went back to Ron and Linda’s. Ron gave Clarence the \$200 Tony had ripped him off and gave me the rest. I counted out our \$10,000 between the bundle and his wallet and put the rest in envelopes for Frankie and Walt.”

Sharon was grinning from ear-to-ear. They had their money back and the SOB got what was coming to him.

“Ok so I know where the money came from,” Sharon said, “But why did you give me half?”

“You had to cook the meals and everything else,” Gary said, “So it was only fair.”

“We’d better get going to Stater Brothers,” Sharon said.

They bought all of the pasta and sauces that \$100 would buy. When the girls went to the store, they could fill in anything Sharon had missed. Buying just one category of an item at a time, they could focus in on whatever they needed and the store had a lot of. Next week, they would buy something else and later this week Lorrie and Amy would also shop in the same manner. Gary told Sharon that since he had some found money, he was going to get a different scope for his new M1A. He’d loan the first night vision scope to Clarence and put the second one on the standard M1A. The new scope was going on his loaded standard model. When they got home and had the car unloaded, Gary walked down to Ron’s.

“Howdy partner,” Ron greeted him.

“Could you call her and tell her I want to buy the other night vision scope?” Gary asked.

“I’ll be right back,” Ron said.

Five minutes later, he was back. “She can see us right now Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “Go get your money and bring the rifle and she’ll mount and sight in the scope no charge.”

Preparations – Chapter 15 – Some Basic Info

Gary stopped by Clarence's and borrowed his FAL 'for an hour'. He got his two M1A's and counted his magazines. He had 23 M-14 magazines. He grabbed a bunch of money, not bothering to count it. Gary took the FAL and his 2 M1A's and headed for Ron's. Ron gave him a funny look but didn't say anything. When they got to her home, Ron helped Gary carry the rifles inside.

"I'd like that GS37 installed on the loaded standard model," Gary said, "And the GS18 on the standard M1A. Put the 117 on Clarence's rifle."

"I can only install one for free," she said, "But I'll only charge you \$20 apiece to install the others and sight them in."

"Fair enough," Gary said, "How long will it take?"

"Three hours," she said, "We have to take the rifles out to a place near Devil's Punch-bowl to sight them in."

Gary counted out \$4,540 onto the counter and told her they would be back in about 3 hours. Then he stopped, remembered something and counted out another \$150.

"I also want 3 more M-14 mags," Gary said.

She walked to the bedroom and came back with the 3 magazines. Gary stuck them in his pocket and Ron and he went back to the tract. Gary went to Clarence's and explained that he was having an improvement added to the FAL, but it would take 3 hours or so. Then, Gary walked down to Ron's.

"Why don't you buy a night vision scope for your M1A?" Gary asked.

"Don't have the money Gar-Bear," Ron said.

"If I were willing to stake you to one, would you take it?" Gary asked.

"Of course, but are you sure you want to do that?"

"I should be getting \$5k from the bank in a few days, Ron," Gary said. "Damon should be here real soon and I have enough money on hand to get you the GS37 for your rifle."

"You're counting your chickens before they hatch," Ron said.

"I gave Sharon \$5k and still have almost \$500 left out of the \$10k I got from Tony," Gary explained. "I set aside money to repay Frankie and Walt, too because there was just enough. I can risk sparing the 4 grand for a week or so."

“Are you ok on propane and food?” Ron asked.

“I need some propane, but I have plenty for what I need,” Gary said. “Quit worrying about me, yes or no?”

“Ok, yes,” Ron said.

“Call and see if she’s left yet,” Gary suggested, “If she hasn’t and has another GS37, tell her to wait and you’ll bring your rifle. I’ll go get the cash right now.”

Gary walked back to the house and picked up \$5,500. He was back at Ron’s in less than 5 minutes.

“Did she have one?” Gary asked.

“Yes.” Ron replied.

“Here’s \$5,500,” Gary said, “Get the scope, 3 cases of the surplus 7.62x51 and 6 more M1A mags, please.”

“Ciao,” Ron said after he tucked the money in his pocket and grabbed his rifle from the closet.

“Why are you doing this Gary?” Linda asked.

“I owe Ron big time Linda,” Gary began, “He saved my life literally and figuratively. I’m going to be 62 in about 4 weeks. In all of those 62 years, I’ve never had a better or closer friend. Besides, with that scope, he’ll stand a far better chance when we get real trouble.”

“Just wondered,” Linda said.

“Ask him to stop by if he has some free time,” Gary requested, “Otherwise have him call me when we’re supposed to pick up the rifles.”

“Ok,” Linda said.

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Gary decided to take a short nap. The next thing he knew, Ron was standing in the living room with his two rifles and Clarence’s FAL.

“I asked Linda to have you stop by or call me,” Gary said.

“She told me, and I called, but Sharon said you were sleeping, so I told her to forget it,” Ron answered.

“Thanks for picking up the rifles,” Gary said.

“The ammo and magazines are outside in my trunk,” Ron announced, “Why don’t you get them while I return Clarence’s rifle to him?”

“Tell him the scope is a loan,” Gary said.

“There you go with that brown cow crap again,” Ron said, “You’d never take it back, you don’t need it.”

“I was thinking about putting it on the Mini-14,” Gary said.

“You will have one on the Mini-14 in about 10 days and it won’t be this scope,” Ron laughed.

“Ok, just tell him Merry Christmas,” Gary said.

“I’ll be back in a minute,” Ron said, “And I’ll help with the ammo.”

Ron Green liked to visit. It often drove Gary nuts when Ron and he would go somewhere and Ron would start up a conversation and Gary was waiting for up to a half hour or more for Ron to say goodbye. Gary had the ammo put away, all of his new magazines loaded with 18 rounds, another web belt and harness setup and magazine pouches installed long before the minute was up. He’d gotten the mag pouches off the web a long time ago and they held 3 M-14 magazines each. Each rig had 5 pouches on it and 2 full canteens. Gary almost staggered under the weight of 15 magazines and a half-gallon of water. Each rifle also held a magazine, thus accounting for his 32 magazines.

Except for the knives on the rigs, they were identical and interchangeable. One had his Rambo I knock off and the other his Rambo II knock off and both had an empty .45 Colt Auto holster and 4 Colt mags spread between 2 pouches. He had a rig set up for the Mini-14, too. It had 12 M16 mags in four pouches plus the canteens, empty holster, 4 Colt mags and his Rambo III knockoff. Although he carried 390 rounds of 5.56×45, counting the mag in the rifle, it seemed to only weigh about half what the 160 rounds of 7.62, not counting the mag in the rifle, weighed. Of course, Gary could have carried fewer loaded M-14 magazines, but he would just as soon have the ammo in mags rather than in stripper clips in his Alice packs.

Gary began to think that when the next little batch of money came in he would get two more used M1911’s and make the rigs totally independent and complete in and of themselves. On the other hand, there weren’t enough guns to go around. Assuming he took 1 M1A and David took the other, DeWayne would take the Mini-14. That only left the Winchester and his shotgun for 2 of David’s four boys. There was the 9422 but it was strictly for hunting. Maybe he should buy a couple of rifles for the other two boys, or maybe 4 identical rifles and give them each one. He guessed that it depended on the

money situation more than anything else. Since Clarence had both a Garand and a FAL, maybe he would sell the Garand. Come to think of it she said she had several Garand's, maybe that was the way to go. He decided to go talk to Clarence.

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"Hi Gary, come on in," Clarence said. "What's up?"

"I'll cut to the chase, pal," Gary said, "Would you be interested in selling that Garand and the ammo you bought for it? I would be willing to pay you cash money for the rifle and ammo and just exactly what you paid for the stuff. You wouldn't be out a dime."

"I have 3 cases of that Korean ammo," Clarence said. "But I won't sell the rifle and ammo to you. You gave me that money and then wrote it off and then came up with that night scope, so you just take the rifle and ammo."

"That doesn't seem right Clarence," Gary said.

"Ok, then I owe you \$1,700 and you can deduct the price of the rifle and ammo from the \$1,700," Clarence said, "And I want exactly \$1,700 for the rifle and ammo."

"Is that your best offer? Free or free?" Gary laughed.

"And I bought one of the WW II surplus belts to hold the M1 clips too and it's included in the price at no extra charge," Clarence laughed.

"You drive a hard bargain pal, but you have a deal," Gary said.

"I charge for delivery, too," Clarence said, "Go home and put the coffee on and send some of those boys over to get the ammo. Let me get you the rifle and cartridge belt or whatever you call it. "I'll be over for coffee in a minute."

That simplified matters; Gary would just buy each of the other 3 boys an M1 and a cartridge belt. As restive as it was getting maybe he should take care of that tomorrow. Anyway, all the men folk had guns of some description now and Sharon had his .32 Sauer und Sohn war souvenir. He kept it loaded with one up the pipe because Sharon couldn't or wouldn't get the hang of operating the slide on the Sauer und Sohn. Hell, he even had trouble with it despite the trick Fleataxi tried to teach him over the phone. And, the little Sterling POS wasn't accurate for more than about 10'.

"You know the reason I bought that FAL was that the Garand is a real thumb buster and I just couldn't get the hang of it," Clarence said. "Do you suppose she might have one of those doohickeys that I can use to load the stripper clips into the FAL mags?"

"I expect so Clarence, she has about everything," Gary said, "Or maybe I should say had. I bought a bunch of stuff from her lately."

“We all did Gary,” Clarence laughed, “You tell her I want her to throw in the doohickey.”

“I’m not sure, but I think that Magazine Charger or Stripper Clip Guide is a more accurate name than doohickey Clarence,” Gary said, “But I know what you mean and will get you some.”

“Do you think I need more 7.62x51 ammo?” Clarence asked.

“You have 1,600 rounds of 7.62x51 that should be enough,” Gary said, “Ron has 5 cases and I’ve lost count of how many cases I have, but a lot. I had Ron get me 3 more today, so I guess that makes 8 800-round cases of surplus.”

“What’s this thing about the different primers?” Clarence asked.

“A boxer primer is a lot easier to reload, that’s all. You can reload Berdan primers, but it’s a lot harder,” Gary explained, “We’re not into reloading, at least not yet, so it doesn’t make a whole lot of difference. They’re both reliable.”

“Why do we buy surplus ammo?” Clarence asked.

“Primarily because of price. And most military ammo has lacquered primers and necks, so it’s a little better in a wet environment,” Gary said. “But mostly price.”

“Tell me a little about calibers,” Clarence said, “If you have time.”

“Ok, the current standard US round is the 5.56x45 or 5.56x45mm; we also use the 7.62x51mm. Both are NATO standard cartridges. That Garand uses a standard .30-06 round. The original AK-47 used 7.62x39mm and the new Russian AK-74 uses a 5.45x39mm round,” Gary explained. “There are other popular calibers like the 7.62x54mm rimmed Russian round and the 8mm Mauser. If you start getting into some of those old calibers, it gets confusing, at least to me. Stick with the NATO cartridges.”

“What about handgun cartridges?” Clarence asked.

Preparations – Chapter 16 – More Basic Info

“Now you’re getting into an area where there is a lot of personal preference involved,” Gary continued. “The official cartridge of NATO is the 9mm. I don’t care for it because it just doesn’t have enough stopping power. The one time Derek called me from Kosovo, he mentioned that he was learning to double tap with his M-9, that’s the Beretta handgun the US adopted, for that very reason. Take that Chief’s Special of yours for example. It’s a .38 Special but it won’t safely handle the +P loads and it only has 5 rounds. It’s almost on the short side of enough. I suppose you’d be ok if you stick to hollow points, but I like something heavier.”

“Like that cowboy gun you carry?” Clarence laughed.

“Don’t knock it friend,” Gary smiled, “The .45 Colt has been around since around 1873. It has the key feature I want in a handgun cartridge, stopping power. Those slow heavy bullets tend to stop a man where he stands. That’s why the US used the M1911 for 70 plus years. It uses the .45 ACP cartridges. I’d like to see them dump the M-9 and either return to the M1911 or maybe adopt the 10mm. The 10mm is .40 caliber and it has a lot of knockdown power. The FBI uses a variation on the round called the .40 S&W. It’s sort of a 10mm short.”

“Why didn’t they just use the 10mm?” Clarence asked.

“I don’t know. According to Fleataxi, they’re a bunch of limp wrists or something and the 10mm had too much recoil,” Gary shook his head. “Derek is 100% in favor of the US going to the 10mm. If you can’t handle a pistol, the .357 has a lot of advantages. You can shoot .38 ammo in it until you get pretty good with the gun and then switch to the .357 ammo later; and the .38 ammo is a lot cheaper than the .357 ammo. The advantage to a pistol compared to a revolver is that you carry more cartridges and reloading takes only moments. One disadvantage is that people with no strength in their hands sometimes have trouble working the slide to chamber the first round.”

“If I were looking for a cheap upgrade from my .38, what would you recommend?” Clarence asked.

“Easy. The M1911. You can get a good used knockoff cheap and it has that stopping power,” Gary said. “The magazines were only about 8 bucks for the government surplus 7-round mag. She’s only charging \$10 now.”

“It’s something to think about,” Clarence said. “I appreciate you taking time to explain it to me.”

“Why don’t you come with us when we go see her next time?” Gary suggested. “I’m thinking about getting 2 more 1911’s for my rigs and some Garand’s for the boys.”

“I might just do that Gary,” Clarence said. “Enjoy the M1. I’ve got to get home. And

Gary, thanks.”

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25Feb05...

Gary was up early making ‘quick trips’ to the john. Something had gotten him good. Maybe it was something he ate or maybe it was just nerves. Damon should have been there the day before. He was probably sitting in a jail somewhere facing charges for going 100mph on that Harley. Hopefully. Gary had expected more trouble than they got over the food riot thing, but it had only been 11 days since TSHTF. The longest 11 days of his life and he was spending money like a drunken sailor, but there always seemed to be something to spend money on. He counted his money. He had about \$2,000. Make that \$4,700, because he had no idea how to get a hold of Frankie or Walt. Sharon still had \$4,900. That was food and propane money. 3 Garand’s at \$500 and 2 used 1911’s at maybe \$400 plus maybe 9 cases of the Korean ammo would run him most of the money he had left; say \$3,000. He was going to buy those guns, he decided. They could get by and you couldn’t take it with you, he rationalized.

After his system settled down, Gary checked his email. He had another one from Derek

“NCD .45 – G20/10mmx2+15. Bro Fstaff. All ok.”

What was it with Derek and all of the cryptic messages? Gary assumed the message translated into no can do on the M1911’s, but that Derek had picked up some of those 10mm Glock 20’s he was so hot about. Did the +15 mean that he’d somehow managed to get some of the 15 round magazines? Damon was apparently in Flagstaff, Arizona and everyone in Iowa was ok. What was Derek afraid of or what did he know? Surely the FBI didn’t have time to monitor emails just 11 days after the attacks. Oh well, the message didn’t require a reply but he decided to send one anyway.

“Dear Cryptokid,

“We are all ok here. I thought Damon would have been here yesterday. Not much trouble, but if you remember our houseguest and his girlfriend, he got his. Money was a lifesaver. Thank you. We have plenty of food and propane. Security taken care of. Why the crypto?”

Dad”

After he sent the message, Gary checked out the Des Moines Register. There seemed to be an absence of national news, what did that mean? Up until now, he had been getting more national news from the Iowa paper than from KTPI. He checked the obits, as was his habit, and decided to back on out of the Register and see if he could get any other news websites up. When he got the SBC homepage back up, he had another message from Derek.

“1984”

That was the entire message. No hello, goodbye or anything, just “1984”. Oh, now it made sense, ‘Big Brother is watching’. Apparently Derek did know something he didn’t. There had been a lot of talk a couple of years back about some FBI computer program that watched the net. Maybe they had a program running now watching for keywords to try and find the terrorists or something. Derek and he had talked about secret communications a half dozen times and had decided on a book code if they ever needed to use it, based on the King James Bible. 1- was Old Testament and 2-was New Testament. Gary decided to try it out to see if it really would work.

Gary sent the following message to Derek: 2+1+17+5+28-31. (New Testament, Matthew, Chapter 17, Verse 5, Words 28 through 31 = I am well pleased) If Derek understood, he would reply in kind with 2+4+3+16. That referred to John 3:16, a famous Bible verse. Even if someone could crack the code, they wouldn’t know that it had to be verified with that verse before it went into effect. Of course, this bit of news put a whole new light on things; Gary needed to talk to Ron and Clarence.

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9am...

“Something is very wrong guys,” Gary said. The three geezers were sitting at Ron’s kitchen table.

“Like what Gar-Bear?’ Ron asked.

“Like I got an email from Derek this morning, in fact 2 emails,” Gary said. “The first one was in shorthand like the last one he sent. Damon is in Flagstaff and Derek bought a couple of Glock 20, 10mm handguns. Anyway, I replied in the clear and a few minutes later got an email that said ‘1984’.”

“What’s that mean?” Clarence asked.

“It was a reference to George Orwell’s book, Clarence.” Gary explained. “You know the one where it was a futuristic society where the government watched every move the people made. I translated it to mean ‘Big Brother is watching’. I am not totally sure what that means, so I sent Derek a message based on a book code we worked out a long time ago.”

“What’s a book code?” Ron asked.

“Simply put Ronald, two people have identical copies of the same book and they create a message by referring to page numbers, lines, words or whatever,” Gary continued. “Our code is based on the King James Bible, I’ll explain it later. Anyway, I got back the

confirmation I needed after I sent him a message in the book code.”

“Sounds like a bunch of science fiction nonsense to me,” Ron said.

“Maybe or maybe not,” Gary pressed.

“Derek is on active duty and is a NonCom,” Gary answered, “He would have a little better access to plans than your average grunt. Besides, have either of you been listening to KTPI?”

“I have,” Clarence said, “But they don’t have as much national news as they did last week.”

“Neither does the Des Moines Register, Clarence,” Gary reported. “It’s like there is a news blackout in effect at the national level.”

“What’s going on?” Ron asked.

“That’s the point partner, something they don’t want us to know about,” Gary shook his head. “Can you call her? I have some jingle burning a hole in my pocket.”

“It’s awful early in the morning,” Ron objected.

“It’s going to be a long day Ron,” Gary replied, “Just call her, please.”

Ron made the call and she would see them right now because she wanted to leave the AV. Most of her inventory was gone and she had family in Denver. Gary grabbed his cash and Ron drove the 3 of them over to her house.

“What can I do for you 3 yard birds today?” she smiled.

“I’d like 3 Garand’s, 2 M1911’s and 9 cases of the Korean surplus ammo,” Gary said.

“New or used .45’s?” she asked.

“Good used,” Gary said.

“Ok, \$625 apiece for the rifles, \$500 apiece for the pistols, \$10 apiece if you want any more mags, and \$80 a case on the Korean,” she said.

Gary had forgotten the 125% bit, but he told her ok.

“I have one more case of the Korean, if you want it,” she said.

“Ok,” Gary replied.

“\$3,675,” she said.

Gary counted out the money. They hauled the ammo to the car and he was just getting ready to leave when he remember a couple of things.

“Clarence needs a couple of chargers for those FAL magazines and I need 3 of the USGI WW II surplus ammo belts for the M-1 clips,” he said.

She walked into the bedroom and came out a couple of minutes later with a paper bag.

“I appreciate all of the business you guys have given me,” she said. “I put in 12 extra .45 mags and I want you to take that case of .45 ACP sitting over there. No charge.”

“Uh, thanks a lot. Are you leaving for Colorado?” Gary asked.

“In about 2 hours,” she said.

“Take care and thanks again,” Gary said.

He picked up the case of .45 ACP, the bag and headed to the car. On the way back to the housing tract, he sorted through the bag and pulled out the FAL magazine chargers, handing them to Clarence. He was as done as he was going to and their source for guns and ammo had just dried up. He probably should have bought Clarence an M1911, but Clarence hadn't said anything and it had slipped his mind. He didn't really need the M1911 mags either, but what the hell, you could never have too many magazines. Maybe there was room on the pistol belts for another magazine pouch or two, but if he added much more to those rigs, he was going to have to add training wheels to support the load; the suspenders were biting his shoulders.

Gary got David's 4 boys together in one place and gave them each a rifle and an ammo belt. He explained, rather than demonstrated, the problem with loading the Garand. They were young and had quick reflexes. He figured it wouldn't take them too long to learn about the Garand Thumb. Flagstaff was a day away on a good day and Gary had no idea what kind of roadblocks, if any, the CHP and Guard had set up on I-40 and the other highways entering California. Damon was resourceful, when he had to be, and Gary was beginning to think that his oldest son would show up in maybe 2 more days.

He loaded the 12 mags, plus the 2 in the pistols. Then he found 6 more pistol double mag pouches and added them to the pistol belts. That got the rigs up to about the limit of what he could carry. The pistols went into the leather holsters and the rigs were hung up out of the kids' reach. Then, he ate a light lunch and sat down in his recliner. He was tired and was sound asleep in minutes. Gary was awakened some time later, he had no idea what time it was, by a lot of gunfire coming from the entrance of the tract. He slid into a rig, grabbed the loaded M1A and a handheld and headed to the entrance to the tract.

Preparations – Chapter 17 – Fun, Fun, Fun?

Gary wasn't moving too fast, loaded down the way he was. Maybe he needed to lose some of those magazine pouches. 5 M-14 pouches (15 mags), 4 M1911 pouches (8 mags) and 2 quarts of water made for a pretty heavy load for a tired old man. He rounded the corner where Moonraker Road turned into Stardust Place and squatted down next to Jose's fence. He could see Chris and Matt about ½ way to the entrance, trying to get there, but moving slowly. There was a lot of fire coming into the tract from across the road. Where in the hell was the National Guard, anyway? Gary began to work his way slowly towards the entrance, keeping low. Ron joined him, followed a minute or two later by Clarence. They weren't making much headway because of the volume of fire.

Most of the fire was going over their heads, and belly crawling wasn't really an option with all of those mag pouches. If they were going to get hit, it would probably be in the butt; that stuck up the furthest. They made it to the next house with the rail fence and moved across the lawn. In this yard, they were pretty much out of the line of fire. Gary had taken just a moment and had interchanged the "day module eyepiece" with the "night module eyepiece", giving him a daylight scope. The next two houses didn't have fences and that would bring them up to the right side foxhole. They stayed close to the homes and out of the line of fire. When they got near the fighting position, Gary unbuckled his harness and let the rig fall to the ground and noticed that Ron and Clarence did the same.

From this vantage point, the men could see a lot of people, and I mean a LOT of people, in the field across the road. The GS37 was variable from 4 to 12 power. Gary cranked his scope to 12X, laid the cross hairs on a guy, did the breathing bit and squeezed; one down and a jillion-1 to go. He wasn't hitting with every shot, but even the misses helped to keep their heads down, whoever 'they' were. He seemed to be firing about one round every 10 seconds. Eventually the bolt locked open and he swapped mags. He noticed in the process that Ron was keeping pace with him, but Clarence was firing a lot more often. Clarence had fewer mags (10) than Gary (16) or Ron (15). He was going to get to use that magazine charger very soon.

It didn't take Gary quite as long to empty the second magazine, but then, he'd scored fewer hits, too. Bullets were whizzing over their heads and kicking up dirt all around them, but so far none of them had been hit. A round hit Gary's straw hat, lifting it from the ground where he'd thrown it and sailing it through the air. That po'd him off royally and he concentrated on making his shots count. Where in the hell were the cops and Guard? Gary heard a yell and looked. Matt had been grazed by a bullet and looked to be bleeding fairly heavily. Chris took a moment to slap on one of the battle dressings Gary had given him way back when and returned to defending the tract. Gary had bought a whole carton of the battle dressings, never really imagining that they'd need them. He'd passed them out among some of the folks like Dick, Chris, Ron, Clarence and Gary's family members.

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The defenders seemed to be taking a toll on whoever was in the field across the street. So far the only defender casualties were Matt and one very treasured hat. They had added more foxholes, but it was becoming apparent that they hadn't added enough. Gary heard another grunt and looked to see who was hit this time. Ron lay slumped with blood pouring from his head. Gary grabbed his battle dressing and 1911 and worked his way over to Ron. It was a glancing hit that had gouged a deep furrow in Ron's scalp. He'd live, but man was he going to have a headache. He might even have a concussion, but this was neither the time nor place to worry about that. Gary put the battle dressing on as best he could, picked up the 1911 and returned to his rifle. He could hear the sirens in the distance and hoped it was the Sheriff's Department and not a fire truck.

By this time, Gary wasn't worrying so much about aimed fire as just keeping the buttheads across the street heads down. He was going through a magazine a minute, maybe more. He cranked off on the setting from 12X to 4X and was rewarded with a much larger 10-degree field of view. At 12X, the field of view was narrow, only about 3 degrees. With the bigger field, Gary could see several men across the road that were far too exposed and he took his time and shot several of them. He wasn't concerned about making a killing shot each time, just stopping them. He noticed that Clarence had a blister pak open and was getting familiar with the magazine charger. That was the last thing he noticed, the lights suddenly went out.

Clarence noticed that Gary was down. He stopped reloading his magazines and went to help Gary. He couldn't find blood anywhere, but old Gar-Bear was unconscious. Clarence wondered what could account for that and looked around. Well, there was a fist-sized rock lying not too far away, maybe it had been struck by a bullet and had clobbered Gary in the head. The rock looked like a bullet might have grazed it. There was nothing he could do for Gary, so Clarence resumed loading magazines and when he was done continued firing. It was about then that the National Guard and LA County Sheriff's Department arrived on the scene. Clarence put down the FAL and went to check on Ron and Gary. Both men were still unconscious and Gary had stopped Ron's bleeding so Clarence waited for the guys that were piling out of the Paramedic truck to come help his two friends.

Clarence had never felt so helpless in his life. One of the paramedics went to check on Matt and one came to check on Ron and Gary. Since Ron had blood on him the Paramedic examined him first. An ammonia inhalant snapped Ron back to consciousness and he reached for his head and ran into the bandage.

"What happened?" Ron groaned.

"You got shot in the head, Ron," Clarence said.

"Well good," Ron tried to joke, "At least I didn't get hit in a vital spot."

The Paramedic moved to Gary and applied the ammonia to him. Gary's eyes popped open after a moment or two and he started cussing a blue streak. The Paramedic checked Gary's eyes and saw that the right eye was slightly dilated. It appeared that Gary had a mild concussion. Gary had a good heartbeat, so the Paramedic moved back to Ron. He checked Ron's eyes and the right one was dilated, too. Apparently he also had a mild concussion. However, when he listened to Ron's heart, he didn't like what he heard.

"Does this man have a history of heart disease?" he asked Clarence.

"I guess, he had a bypass a few years ago," Clarence said trying to remember when Ron had had the surgery. (1992)

The Paramedic pulled Ron's shirt further open and began slapping on electrodes. When Ron was hooked up, he monitored Ron's heartbeat. It appeared that Ron was missing beats in blocks, but he couldn't be 100% certain. For sure Ron was going to the hospital in Lancaster. Under normal circumstances, they would have transported Gary too, but Gary's eye wasn't all that dilated and aside from the cussing, he seemed to be doing ok.

They put Matt and Ron in one ambulance and transported the two men to Lancaster Community Hospital. With only two operating hospitals in the AV, the hospitals were swamped. However since the men were brought in by ambulance, they went to the front of the line. Matt only needed a couple of stitches and a tetanus shot and he would be ok. As it happened, Ron's cardiologist was helping out in the ER that day. When he saw Ron, he went to check with the Paramedics. The EKG didn't look all that good, so he told the nurses to admit Ron for possible surgery the next day after his head was sewn up. He had to observe Ron before he'd be sure, but it appeared that Ron might need a pacemaker.

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Chris had followed the ambulance to Lancaster and Clarence and Dick had gathered up Ron and Gary's things and taken them to Gary's. At least Gary had stopped cussing when Sharon had put an ice pack on his head and given him 2 Vicodin ES. The Paramedics had given Clarence a handout about head injuries to give to Sharon and she was keeping an eye on him. "His head must really hurt," she thought, "He hasn't even reached for a cigarette."

Chris and Matt returned to the tract about two hours later. The National Guard had killed most of the attackers, and had transported those who had surrendered to a detention facility erected at Plant 42. It was the typical barbed wire enclosure with a few tents in it. None of the detainees were being abused, but neither were they receiving much care. The wounded were patched up by medics and taken to the same lockup. If they lived, they lived. A medic checked on the patients twice a day, but they weren't really receiving the treatment one might have expected.

After observing Ron's EKG for a while Dr. E decided that Ron had to have the pacemaker. He scheduled surgery for 6am. Sharon and Lucy had driven Linda to the hospital; and a couple of David's boys had come along for company. Their Garand's were in the trunk and they'd borrowed 2 of the 1911's and had those stuck in the small of their backs. Dr. E suggested that after Linda checked on Ron she return home, the hospital was just too crowded for visitors. He told her to be there at 6am the next morning for the surgery.

[In real life, Ron is getting a pacemaker put in tomorrow, 02Jul04. – TOM]

Clarence came by late in the day to check on Gary.

"How are you doing?" Clarence asked.

"It feels like I got smacked by a baseball bat," Gary said.

"More like the baseball," Clarence said handing a rock to Gary.

"What's this?" Gary asked.

"I do believe it's the rock that smacked you upside the head, Gary," Clarence said.

"You heard anything about Ron?" Gary asked.

"Minor heart problem and a concussion," Clarence said. "They're going to put in a pacemaker tomorrow and he should be home the day after, if there are no problems."

"You ok?" Gary asked.

"Didn't get hurt in the battle if that's what you're asking," Clarence said, "But having Ron and you down and out doesn't make me too happy."

"I'll be ok after I get some rest Clarence," Gary said, "Thanks for your concern. How are you holding up? Anymore heart problems or anything?"

"Nah. The Paramedic checked me out before he left, I'm fine," Clarence said.

What the Paramedic had really said was that Clarence seemed to be fine, but he had recommended that Clarence see his cardiologist soon. The old lub-dub was more like lu-dub. Clarence had made an appointment to see Ron's cardiologist after Ron got out of surgery the next day. Clarence didn't figure he needed to bother Gary with his problems, besides, he felt fine.

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26Feb05...

Gary hadn't heard Sharon leave to drive Linda to Lancaster. He woke up around 9am with a splitting headache. He looked in the mirror and his pupils seemed to be normal. He went to the China cabinet and got his little MagLite and tested his pupil reactions standing in front of the bathroom mirror. They seemed to be equal and reactive, so maybe the concussion wasn't too bad. He debated whether to take 2 Tylenol or 2 Vicodin ES. The Vicodin won out. The coffee in the pot was about half warm, so he poured a cup and warmed it in the microwave. Then he gritted his teeth and headed down the hall to his office and flopped into his chair.

Gary checked his emails and had one from Derek. It was in the book code and his head hurt too much to try and decipher it. If it were extremely urgent, the top line would have begun with an asterisk and he didn't see one. He hoped Damon would show up today, he didn't like the idea of Damon being out there alone. But, knowing Damon, he'd bought a shotgun, put a pistol grip on it and cut the barrel down to 14" or, cut the barrel and magazine tube down even further. Damon was as partial to the 3" 15-pellet 00 buckshot as he was. And, if Damon saw a roadblock, he'd probably just go cross-county. His bike wasn't loaded down with a lot of junk, just saddlebags, if Gary remembered right. Damon's biggest problem was that he was just like Gary but didn't have a rich father to spoil him.

Sharon got back from Lancaster around 10am. Ron came through the surgery with flying colors and unless something changed, he'd be home tomorrow. Sharon asked how Gary felt and he said that other than the headache, he was fine. He was going over to tell Clarence how Ron had made out.

"Morning Gary, how are you doing? You look good," Clarence said.

"I got a headache that won't quit, but I'll be ok," Gary said. "Sharon just got back from Lancaster. Ronald McDonald came through the operation with flying colors, according to her. She said he'd be home tomorrow."

"That's good to hear," Care for a cup of coffee?" Clarence inquired.

"As long as it's not battery acid, sure," Gary managed a weak smile.

"You do look a little peaked," Clarence observed.

"In 34 years of drinking, I never had a head like this," Gary said, "At least as far as I can remember."

"Did you take something for the headache?" Clarence asked.

"Vicodin ES," Gary said, "But when I get home I think I'll take 2 more."

"I went to the doctor today," Clarence said.

“Why? You said you were ok,” Gary commented.

“I am, he just changed one of my meds,” Clarence said. “I like Ron’s doctor; he gave me a 6 month supply of samples.”

Preparations – Chapter 18 – Ouch, That Hurts

Gary finished off the coffee quickly and returned home. He wanted to take more Vicodin ES and he was very upset over Clarence. When Clarence had said Ron's doctor, Gary had realized that Clarence must have been having heart problems of his own. Crap, Ron with a pacemaker and Clarence was changing meds. Gary's heart was 'fine', so that probably meant that he'd drop dead first. Well, not yet, he had to get his family through whatever was going on. The very idea that someone was censoring the news did not sit well with him. Gary purely hated Reporters, but he hated censorship even more. The reporters needed to learn to balance what they reported and just stick to reporting and stop speculating. The government needed to stop lying to the media and everyone else.

He felt good enough to try and decipher the message from Derek. It was short, so it shouldn't be too hard. The original message read:

1+2+3+2+21, 1+5+6+20+4-6, 2+1+7+22, 1+5+6+25+6,2+1+16+6+9

It translated into:

Bush bear false witness many die beware

Uh, right. This was not good news. If Gary had translated the message correctly, Derek was telling him that Dubya was lying and many had died in the attacks. He wasn't sure what Derek meant by 'beware' but suspected that the government might turn heavy handed. There was some evidence of that with what he'd heard was going on at Plant 42 with the prisoners. There were also the problems the refugees were experiencing. Instead of setting up field kitchens and feeding the people hot meals, they were being given MRE's. And, darn it, California or not, it got cold in the high desert around the end of February and the first part of March. Gary decided that headache be darned, he'd better talk this one over with Chris. Besides, he wanted to know how Matt was doing.

"Hi ya," Chris greeted him, "Come in."

"How's Matt doing?" Gary asked.

"It actually took 7 stitches to close that wound, but he's fine," Chris said, "Sore as hell, but fine. How are you?"

"Man I haven't ever had a headache like this," Gary said, "4 Vicodin ES haven't even touched it. Say, I got a message from my son today, got a minute?"

"Which one?" Chris asked, "Army or Navy?"

"Army," Gary said, "Anyway he sent me an encrypted message that said Bush is lying and that many people died. It also said beware."

“Can you translate into English for me?” Chris asked.

“What I think Derek was trying to say was that the government is getting heavy handed,” Gary opined, “You know the situation at those refugee camps and at Plant 42, don’t you?”

“I’ve heard a few things, nothing good,” Chris replied.

“Clarence seems to be having some sort of heart problem, the doctor changed his meds, and Ron had to have a pacemaker put in today,” Gary explained. “I’m worried that we may be in for trouble from the government to top everything off.”

“Have they gotten into the cities that were nuked?” Chris inquired.

“Not for 2 more days, maybe 3,” Gary answered.

“Dick says that the natural gas will be up in a few days,” Chris comment.

“He said about 10 days back on the 21st, so that would be what, March 3rd?” Gary asked.

“Actually, I think they’re ahead of schedule and it should be back on February 28th, two days from now,” Chris updated Gary.

“Really? Any word on the electricity?” Gary inquired.

“28th or the 1st, according to Dick,” Chris replied.

“Are you guys getting along ok?” Gary asked. “Do you have everything you need?”

“Could you spare a case of rifle ammo?” Chris asked.

“5.56×45?” Gary asked.

“Yeah,” Chris answered.

“Gee, I only had 2 cases, Chris,” Gary said, “I bought you more than that didn’t I?”

“Yeah, but I gave some to Dick,” Chris said.

“Well, I think Ron has a lot of 5.56×45, I can ask him tomorrow when he gets home from the hospital,” Gary said. “You aren’t out are you?”

“No, but I only have one case left,” Chris said.

“I’ll see what I can do, that’s all I can promise,” Gary replied.

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This thing over the 5.56×45 ammo really po’d Gary; Chris didn’t have a pot to pee in or a window to throw it out until he (Gary) bought Chris the Mossberg, Mini-14 and used 1911. He also bought Chris 3 cases (3,000) of 5.56×45, a case of 3” 15-pellet 00 buck (250) and a case (500) of .45 ACP. Why didn’t Dick get ammo from her or Chris tell him he’d given some away? Ron had those 6 rifles, not counting the M1A and most of them were 5.56×45 caliber. As far as Gary knew, Ron only had 3 cases of 5.56×45 ammo, but maybe he was wrong.

Now, if Chris had wanted 7.62×51, Ron and he were swimming in the stuff, but the 5.56×45 was going to be a problem. Well, maybe not; those National Guard troops didn’t seem to take the task of guarding their ammo stores very seriously Gary noticed. What was the difference between scrounging and looting? Oh yeah, the only difference between salvaging and looting was that looting was taking things from people who would be returning. Well, Gary guessed they might have to loot some 5.56×45 from the Guard.

That was an easy rationalization, too. If he had correctly interpreted the message from Derek, maybe the National Guard wasn’t as much their friend as their keeper. Unfortunately, while Gary was all in favor of scrounging, he didn’t believe in looting, so he had a real dilemma. He’d made it a rule for years that when he was in doubt, he didn’t make a decision. He had plenty of 5.56×45 and 7.62×51 and it could wait until he had a chance to talk to Ron about it. The example he gave when people asked him about his attitude was that some decisions couldn’t be avoided, like stepping on the brake when you came to a stop sign; other decisions weren’t so urgent and usually if you gave them time, they worked themselves out. Anyway, that sounded better than saying that he just didn’t give a crap.

Now if she hadn’t left town to go to Denver, it wouldn’t be a problem; he’d just go buy a couple of cases of 5.56×45 and everyone would be happy. But wait; if Dick borrowed a case of 5.56×45 from Chris, then Dick probably needed 5.56×45 worse than Chris did. Gary decided to go find out for himself. He walked over to Dick’s and knocked on the door.

“Hi Gary, what’s up?” Dick asked.

“I’d like to ask a question if you wouldn’t think me too nosey Dick,” Gary said.

“No problem, want a cup of coffee?” Dick asked.

“Sure,” Gary said and entered the home. They went to the kitchen and sat down at the breakfast bar.

"What do you want to know?" Dick asked.

"How are you on 5.56x45 ammo?" Gary inquired.

"I ran out Gary and had to borrow a case from Chris, why?" Dick remarked.

"No special reason, Dick; Chris was asking me for more 5.56x45 tonight," Gary explained.

"I'm getting 4 cases tomorrow and will pay him back then," Dick said.

"Where, if I may ask," Gary wanted to know.

"You know the gun store over on Q?" Dick asked.

"I thought she went to Denver," Gary shook his head.

"They started out and got turned back at Victorville by the CHP," Dick explained.

"You know, my son told me that things might not be right with the feds. And it sounds like its not limited to just the feds," Gary commented.

"Well, anyway they're back and she said they were going to sell of the rest of the inventory and try again," Dick said.

"I do a lot of business with her, could I ride along tomorrow?" Gary asked.

"Sure, be here at 9am," Dick said.

When he got home, Gary counted his money. He had \$1,000 and change. That was enough; he'd buy 4 cases of the 5.56x45. That would give him 6,000 rounds and he could supply Ron. Chris was getting his ammo back the next day, so he wasn't going to worry about Chris. He was going to ask Dick not to mention that he had purchased more 5.56x45, though, Chris was sometimes miserly and sometimes a moocher and he didn't want Chris knowing he had stocked up unless it became necessary. He was willing to share, but only when it was necessary. Besides, he told himself, you've already shared a lot!

Gary was going to have to write Derek a letter, but that book code was cumbersome. At least he had a Concordance to help him find most of the words he would need to use. What he needed to know was the extent of the threat posed by the feds and how far it extended. Did it include state governments and if so, which ones? Probably California since the CHP had turned her back at Victorville. Did the CHP being at Victorville stopping traffic mean that Damon was going to have a problem? He took his meds and went to bed, his head still hurt like he'd been stomped by a bull.

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27Feb05...

Gary was roused out of his sleep a little after 3am. He heard the roar of a motorcycle that seemed to stop right at their house. Then he heard the sirens. He was groggy as hell, but he put 2 and 2 together, pulled on his pants and grabbed the closest gun, his Winchester. He went out the front door and looked around, but couldn't see anything. He walked over to the sidewalk that led to the backyard and noticed that the gate was open. He jacked a round into the Winchester and started down the sidewalk to the backyard. When he got to the backyard, there was some biker parking his Harley. The light bulb didn't go off.

"Put your hands up," Gary growled.

"Jeez, Dad, is that any way to say hi?" Damon asked.

Gary thumbed off the hammer and walked over to Damon.

"Are those sirens connected to you?" he asked.

"Yeah," Damon said, "I ran a roadblock getting here."

"Let me get the key and we'll put your bike in the shed," Gary said, "You move it over there and I'll be right back."

Gary retraced his steps down the sidewalk and closed the gate. The little used padlock was hanging on the gate, so he locked it. He went into the house and got the key to the shed and went out the patio door. Using his miniature MagLite to see, he unlocked the door to the shed and Damon and he manhandled the Harley into the building and locked the door. He led Damon into the house, got a chair and opened the trap to the garage attic in his office and told Damon to get up there and be quiet. Then, he went to the bedroom, took off his pants, put on his robe and slippers and returned to the front door. He walked out the door and looked around like someone would if they'd been awakened by a disturbance during the middle of the night.

A Deputy Sheriff's patrol car was slowly cruising down the street, shining its spots on the homes on either side of the street. Gary just stood there, looking dumb. Damon hadn't left any tire marks on the street and the driveway was dry, so there was no outward sign that the bike had come up the driveway. The Deputies never even slowed down, they just shined the light in Gary's face for a moment and continued. Gary watched until they'd turned the corner and went back in the house. He went to his office and called to Damon.

"You can come down now."

Preparations – Chapter 19 – Police State

“Can I smoke?” Damon asked.

“Only cigarettes and only in this room or outside,” Gary said, “How the hell are you?”

“It was quite an adventure getting here,” Damon said.

“You can give me the long version when I’m feeling better,” Gary said, “How about the capsule version?”

“Something wrong with you?” Damon asked.

“You first,” Gary insisted.

“None of the cities the whole way here were nuked, but with the lights and gas out, things were tough,” Damon said, “Main problem was finding gas. No real trouble until I got to Topock. Saw the CHP and troops at the agricultural station just across the border. Waited until they got busy as hell and blew through at 100 plus. Dumped 40 and took 95 south to 62 and 62 west the Springs and 10 to Berdoo. Went north to 138 and started across. Roadblock at the 138-18 junction was a problem and they chased me here. End of story.”

“We had one hell of a firefight day before yesterday,” Gary said. “Matt got a graze and Ron got a crease in his head. Ron ended up getting a pacemaker yesterday. A slug hit a rock and the rock hit me in the head, knocking me out. Still have a headache.”

“Are you ok, though?” Damon asked.

“I have enough Vicodin ES to get over having my head amputated, so I’m ok,” Gary smiled. “A couple of days and I’ll be fine, really. How are you doing on money?”

“I gave Mutt \$5,000 to prepay the child support and it cost me about \$500 to get here, so I have just shy of 20 grand, why?” Damon asked.

“Do you suppose you could loan your poor old father 5 thousand until I get the next money from the bank?” Gary asked.

“Sure. Did you go through the 25 thousand already? You did get the money, right?” Damon asked.

“I got the money and it is keeping us going Damon,” Gary said, “But there were other considerations like helping Ron and Clarence and some other people and getting some proper armaments. So, I’m down to about \$6,000.”

“Your pal Tony around looking for more money?” Damon asked.

o

Gary couldn't help it, and he started to laugh. He laughed until the tears were running down his face.

"Did I say something funny?" Damon asked.

"Tony showed up all right, to pay us back," Gary said, "But when he reached for the money, we thought he might be going for a gun and the three of us shot him."

"So you didn't get in trouble?" Damon asked.

"Self-defense, with witnesses," Gary said. "He had a gun."

"You told me on the phone onetime that he was deathly afraid of guns," Damon reminded Gary.

"I didn't say who's gun he had Damon. Anyway, let it go and don't repeat the business about him being afraid of guns. Ok?"

"Whatever. Here's the money, take what you need," Damon said handing his Dad a wad of nearly 200 \$100 bills.

Gary counted out \$5,000 and returned the money to Damon. "I said it was a loan Damon," Gary said, "I'll pay you back as soon as I get the money from Charles City. How are you fixed for armaments?"

"There's a sawed off 870 in my saddles," Damon said, "That's all I want or need."

"Need ammo?" Gary asked.

"Yeah, I only have a couple of boxes," Damon admitted.

"You sure you don't want a rifle or handgun?" Gary asked.

"Positive," Damon said.

"Ok. Let's put on some coffee and you can give me the long version," Gary said.

"I'd rather get some sleep," Damon said.

"Take a shower and then you can use my bed. Are you up to a suggestion?" Gary asked.

"Go for it," Damon said.

“We’ll keep the bike locked up for a few days until the heat dies down. In the meantime, I think you ought to get a new look,” Gary explained. “No offense, but if you’d shave off the beard and get a haircut like mine, no one would recognize you. You can let the hair grow back out, of course.”

“Ok, I’ll shave the beard, but what do you do for barbers at 4 in the morning?” Damon asked.

“We’ll do the haircut tomorrow, pal,” Gary said. “There’re clean clothes in the drawers and the pants on top of my dresser in your size. You can get a shirt out of the closet. I’ll see you around lunch time.”

o

Money in hand, Gary joined Dick for the trip over to her home.

“You two know each other?” she asked.

“Two houses between his and mine,” Dick answered.

“What can I do for you Dick?” she asked.

“4 cases of 5.56×45,” Dick said starting to count out the money.

“\$1,000,” She said.

“You raise your prices?” Dick asked.

“Sorry.” she said and took the money and went for the ammo. She came wheeling it back on a cart.

“Gary, what do you need?” she asked.

“4 cases of 5.56×45 and 2 cases of 7.62×51,” Gary said. “Oh, and a case of 3” 12-pellet 00 buck.”

“I have 3 cases of 5.56×45, the 7.62×51 and several cases of Remington 2¾” 12-pellet 00 buck on hand,” she said.

“Ok, I take the 3 cases of 5.56×45, 2 cases of 7.62×51 and 2 cases of the 12-pellet,” Gary said.

“\$1,500,” She said.

It was amazing how she did that. Gary counted out the money and she went after the

ammo, returning in a couple of minutes with a cart stacked high. Dick hauled the ammo to the pickup for Gary. Interesting enough, Walmart had thousands of rounds of ammo, but with martial law declared, they couldn't sell a single round. Operating as she was, she was out of just about everything. She had even gotten a Sheriff's escort to move her store stock to 'secure storage'.

Gary asked her how she was going to get out of California. She said with the money she had, they'd bought an H2 and fuel trailer. They were going cross-country. Gary told her to watch out; the troops and LEO's were out in force. She smiled at him and mumbled something about .50BMG API ammo and a Barrett rifle. Gary decided that he didn't really want to know what she'd said.

When Gary and Dick got back to the tract, Dick unloaded Gary's ammo for him and put it in the garage. Gary got the barber set out and the edger (small clipper) that DeWayne used. Ron got home around 11am, but Gary decided that he was going to wait and take Damon with him, after the haircut. Gary walked down to Chris and Patti's and told Chris that since Dick had replaced the 5.56x45, he wouldn't bother Ron about it.

Gary rolled Damon out at noon, told him to come to the kitchen for his haircut. Damon sort of gave Gary the evil eye, but complied. Yes sir, that boy looked positively human with a butch, Gary thought. Damon went to take a shower to wash off the extra hair and Gary told him that when he got back, they were going to see Ron.

While Damon was in the shower, Sharon made him a stack of sandwiches using leftover chicken. Out of the shower, Damon wolfed the food down like he hadn't eaten in a week, and he probably hadn't. Gary led Damon down to Ron's to show him off. He still had to compose that message to Derek, too.

"How are you feeling?" Gary asked.

"My head hurts," Ron complained.

"Me too," Gary laughed, "I got beamed by a rock. Surgery go ok?"

"I guess, I was asleep," Ron laughed.

"How much 5.56x45 ammo do you have?" Gary asked.

"I have 5 cases," Ron said, "I bought it from Walmart at \$2.97 per box of 50 and have 5 full cases of 20 boxes per case."

"That's only \$60 a case," Gary said.

"Plus sales tax," Ron said. He knew what Gary was getting at and he didn't mind rubbing it in a little. Sometimes, Gary overlooked the obvious.

“And I didn’t even get kissed,” Gary mumbled.

“Hi Damon,” Ron said, “When did you get in?”

“Around 3am,” Damon replied. “Aren’t you two guys a little old to be playing Cowboys and Indians? It sounded to me like you folks were trying to reenact Custer’s Last Stand.”

“It’s tough boy,” Ron winked, “But somebody’s got to do it.”

“I figured you guys would be outfitted with automatic weapons and stuff,” Damon said.

“In California?” Ron winced, “Your Dad has some tricked out guns that are so illegal that he’d go to jail for years if anybody paid attention.”

“Let me put it another way Ron,” Damon said, “Would you like some automatic weapons?”

“I don’t think so Damon,” Ron said. “I appreciate the offer, but we still have to live here once this mess is straightened up.”

“Maybe I’d better tell you what my brother told me,” Damon said, “You might change your mind. There’s a big power grab in DC according to Derek. Bush is just a figure-head, and other people are pulling the strings. They are building relocation camps all over the country. I’d guess I passed maybe 20 of them between Iowa and Palmdale. I gave Dad the short version this morning and didn’t tell him what I saw. Derek said he was going to warn you, didn’t you get the message?”

“Damon his message said ‘Bush bear false witness many die beware’,” Gary said.

“Well, now you know what it means, right?” Damon said.

“How sure are you of this information Damon?” Ron asked.

“Sure enough that I gave Mutt \$5,000 and told her to get the kids out of Iowa and into the woods in Minnesota,” Damon said.

“What do you think Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“We’ll take all you can get, Damon, including M16’s, M203’s, grenades, mortars, Claymore mines, magazines and ammo.”

“I won’t be much help Gary,” Ron said, “But good luck.”

Preparations – Chapter 20 – “Shopping”

When they got back to the house, Damon told Gary that he was going to sleep days and ‘shop’ nights. In the meantime, they had better figure out where they were going to store the ‘merchandise’ he ‘bought’. Gary said something about tunneling under the patio slab, but Damon told him that was too obvious. If he was going to risk his butt stealing from the National Guard, they had better come up with something clever.

At least the bedroom situation would work out fine, Damon and Gary could more or less hot bunk the bed in the master bedroom. This business of finding someplace to store the goods was going to be a problem. They could go underground, into an attic or what else? Gary started to think back on all of the fiction he’d written. Had he ever had a good idea about hiding guns and munitions from prying eyes that they could actually implement? Come to think of it, he had, but how in the hell were they going to do that?

In the very first story that Gary had written he had come up with an interesting way to hide a gun collection. It was the old ‘secret room’ gag, but it had been medium slick. It involved moveable front and back bars in a living room. The idea was that the front bar pulled out from the wall creating a front and back bar. The trick had been to make the back bar slide on the same tracks as the front bar. Releasing two latches had allowed the characters to pull the back bar forward, revealing a medium sized gunroom that had been built by partitioning off a portion of a large adjoining room. The way the houses in this tract were build that might be hard to do. In another story set in this very housing tract, Gary had done a trick with the linen closet, but even that had been a little obvious. And, of course, he’d tunneled under his patio a couple of times too, but some critic had pointed out that someone down in Orange County or somewhere had done that very thing and gotten caught.

But there was the answer, right in front of him the entire time. The Patio gag was a good start, but a little too obvious. Underground was the key, but under the house, not the slab. As far as access to the underground room, the linen closet gag gave him an idea. Why not a linen cabinet that looked built-in but could be lifted up and moved? He knew just who to ask and headed to Dick’s.

“Forget something Gary?’ Dick asked.

“No, but I’ve come across some startling information and I realized that I need to install a floor safe. Could I borrow you for maybe ten minutes?” Gary asked.

“I can spare 10 minutes for you, where are we going?” Dick asked.

“My house, I need your advice and maybe your help,” Gary said.

“What do you have in mind?” Dick inquired.

“I’d like to convert my lower linen closet from a built-in to a cabinet that we could lift out

Dick,” Gary explained. “I know you’ve done some wood working and have lots of power equipment and I’d be willing to pay you cash money for the help. I only offer because it would be a lot of work and it wouldn’t be fair not to pay for your time.”

“I could use a little cash, that ammo today put a big dent in my savings,” Dick said.

By this time, they were at Gary and Sharon’s. Gary led Dick down the hall and showed him the linen closet. It was an overhead cabinet and a separate base cabinet. The cabinets were stand-alone units that had been permanently installed much like kitchen cabinets. Dick inspected the cabinets and then turned to Gary.

“This strip of wood here is what keeps the cabinets in place, Gary,” Dick explained, “I can do what you want, in about a day. Would \$100 be too much for the work?”

“Sounds fair to me,” Gary said, “When could you start?”

“I can pull the cabinet today, work on it in the shop tonight and put it back in tomorrow,” Dick said.

“Ok, we’ll empty the lower cabinet while you’re gone and you can start when you want,” Gary said.

“It will be about an hour,” Dick said, “See you later.”

After Dick had gone, Gary explained to Sharon that he need to empty the lower linen closet for a few days and asked if she minded if he put the contents on one of the tables in her sewing room. That was okay with her, if it didn’t go on a long time, she said. He told her it might take several days, and he was sorry for the inconvenience. Surprised that he was being so considerate, she even helped him empty the cabinet.

Dick was back in about an hour and had the cabinet out about an hour after that. This was going to be easier than Dick first thought. Meanwhile Gary had gone down to Chris’s and asked if he could borrow Chris’s ½” drill motor and a masonry bit. Chris loaned Gary the drill motor and a ½” bit. Gary hung a sheet over the opening to keep down the dust and marked out an 18” by 24” rectangle on the floor centered on the space. He then started to drill holes through the concrete. The darned bit was pretty dull and Gary tracked down David and asked him if he would go to H & E and pick up a couple of new ½” bits.

Gary enlisted David and his 4 boys to help him with the project and they worked through the night. The noise upset Sharon a little but she didn’t complain that loudly. By the time Dick was back the next morning, they were tired, but the rectangle had been drilled out and only needed the concrete between the drill holes chiseled out. Chris’s drill motor hadn’t been the ideal tool, one of those that hammered would have been better, but it didn’t really matter.

Damon had been out that night and had returned with 2 M16A2's, one with and one without the M203. He had 14 magazines, fully loaded, and 8 of the M406 40mm grenades. He also had 4 M67 fragmentation grenades and 1 AT-4. Gary asked Damon to put the stuff in the attic over his office for now. Damon noticed them working on the floor but didn't say anything. Damon had something to eat, took a shower and went to bed.

Dick left the cabinet in the living room and Gary gave him \$100. Dick said he'd come back and install the cabinet when they were ready. By 10am they had the concrete broken up and hauled to the vacant field across Avenue R and strewn about. All of the holes had been drilled outside the line. Gary asked David to pick up a trowel and one bag of premixed concrete or send one of the boys. Gary needed a nap and they could resume tomorrow morning. They vacuumed up the mess and set the cabinet in place. It was heavy, but easily fit into the space. Once in place, there was no evidence that anything had changed.

01Mar05...

The natural gas had come back on during the night. Dick came over and switched the jets for them back to natural gas. Since they had set the cabinet back in place, he offered to refund half of the money Gary had given him but Gary told him to keep the money and forget he'd done the work. Dick understood Gary's message perfectly. Gary called AmeriGas and asked to have his tank and Ron's tank filled. Edison didn't have the electricity up, yet. Gary called the bank and learned his \$5,000 deposit was in and they had enough cash, so he asked Sharon to pick up the money, please.

Gary sent David to H & E to pick up 6 adjustable support columns sometimes used in home construction and 6 more bags of premixed concrete. He got the 4 boys to take turns digging out the dirt in the hole and spreading it around the field to the north. He decided to send a message to Derek in the clear. It said "10+4"

The further they dug, the faster it went. By evening, they had a hole that was 8' deep and about 3' square. Gary sat David down and explained that he wanted a support post every 4' sitting on a 1' square by 2' deep footing. David had read the instructions on the bag of Sackrete and told Gary he thought it would take at least 2 bags per hole.

Gary wanted a room constructed under the slab about 8' square. Gary calculated that would require 9 posts and 18 bags of the Sackrete. Gary asked David to pick up 3 more posts and 12 more bags of Sackrete the next day. He told David to also pick up some 3/4" plywood that was cut into 2' wide by 8' long pieces; 10 sheets or 20 pieces would be enough.

At the end of the day they cleaned up the mess, vacuumed the carpet and set the cabinet back in place. When Damon got up, they talked it over. Damon could go out again tonight, but then, he was to take a day or two off. Gary didn't want any pattern to get established that might expose Damon to too much risk. He asked Damon how he was pulling this thing off.

“Very carefully Dad,” Damon answered. “Let’s just say I turned mugger and let it go at that. Ok?”

“Just don’t be predictable,” Gary said, “You get in a rut and you’re going to get dead real quick.”

“You know, with this curfew, they tend to get lax late at night, so I picked a couple guys out last night and just waited until one of them was half asleep and the other wasn’t paying much attention and well, they’re going to be the laughing stock of their units for a while. What did you come up with for a storage place?”

“Under the linen cabinet,” Gary said.

Damon walked down the hall to the linen cabinet and looked. Nothing seemed out of the ordinary to him. He opened the cabinet and it was empty. Then he tried to rock the cabinet and it just sat there like a cabinet was supposed to.

“Neat,” Damon said when he got back to the kitchen.

“Takes 2 people to move the cabinet, but it’s an unlikely place,” Gary said. “We’re going to start out 8’x8’x8’ and line it with plywood. We’re putting in a post every 4’ to support the slab. And, I’m going to have David pick up some beams to support the slab too, I think. Can’t have the house collapsing.”

“How much longer to get it done?” Damon asked.

“Couple of days,” his dad answered.

“I’m going to take the night off, then,” Damon said. “I’m going out, but just to scout.”

“How is Derek holding up with what he told you?” Gary asked.

“Dad, I’ve never seen him so po’d,” Damon said. “If they try and make him do anything that goes against his grain too badly, he’ll just chuck it all and bring Mary and the kids out here. He got your email about the guns and said he wasn’t going to get any .45’s.

“Got himself a pair of Glock 20’s and a bunch of those high capacity mags. He also bought 2 AR-15’s and had a buddy swap out the lower receivers or something. Ended up with 2 M16A2’s. And then, he bought 2 SA-58’s and a whole bunch of 7.62x51 ammo. Got that gun dealer buddy of his to ignore the waiting periods, too. I wasn’t there long enough to see what else he was doing, but it looks to me like he’s about ready to bug-out when he gets po’d enough.”

“Well, if things are the way you two say they are, I hope he gets here ok,” Gary observed.

“The Army trained him good, Dad,” Damon smiled, “He’ll be ok.”

“You be careful out there tonight,” Gary said.

Gary went back down to check on Ron. At least his headache was simmering down and he’d only had to take a single Vicodin ES twice that day.

“How are you feeling Ron?” Gary asked.

“I’m sore, but my head hurts worse than my chest,” Ron explained. “Can I get some Vicodin from you?”

“Gee, I don’t know pal, I’m down to my last 200 pills,” Gary laughed. “How many do you want?”

“A small handful,” Ron said.

“Let me run down and get them and come back,” Gary said, “I want to talk to you.”

Gary went home, counted out 30 of the pills and returned to Ron’s.

“Jeez,” Ron said, “I said a small handful.”

“Damon says Derek is about ready to bug-out and head this way,” Gary commented. “For him to be thinking that way, this thing must be getting pretty serious. It also sounds like Derek is armed to the teeth.”

“I’ll do what I can to help Gar-Bear, but I’m not going to be much use to you,” Ron said regretfully. “I can load magazines and stuff, but no exertion. Oh, do me a favor, would you? Get me my M1A from the closet.”

Gary got the rifle.

“You take the rifle, mags and LBE with you, Gary,” Ron said, “They’re yours. You can get the ammo as you need it.”

“I can’t take this rifle!” Gary exclaimed.

“Would you rather it just sit in the closet and rust?” Ron asked. “The day/night scope is yours anyway. I still have all those 5.56×45’s and the binoculars you gave me. I’ll just get myself set up in that upstairs bedroom in an easy chair and keep watch. I’ll be on USB, channel 31.”

Gary was flabbergasted. He got Ron’s LBE and returned home with the rifle and the equipment. He guessed Ron must have a feather... Anyway, he was tickled to beat hell,

although, if he had his druthers, Ron would be right out there with him and Clarence fighting the good fight. This whole thing stunk to high heaven. If Bush wasn't running the country, then who the hell was? Then Gary noticed something; the streetlights were back on. Well, Edison had come through after all. Good, AmeriGas had put him off until tomorrow on the tank refill anyway.

Preparations – Chapter 21 – A Change in Plans

02Mar05...

Gary didn't hear Damon come in and take his shower. In fact, he didn't hear anything until Damon shook him to wake him. Damon wanted to go to bed and Gary got up, went to the john and headed for his office. He noticed the cabinet sitting in the hall and David and the boys working on the hole. Sharon brought him some coffee and he had his first smoke so he'd feel a little human. At least his head didn't hurt so badly today; he decided to just take extra-strength Tylenol instead of the Vicodin ES. When he was awake, he asked David to come to the office.

"We're going to need more support for the slab, I think," Gary said. "How about picking up some 2"x12"x8' and some 4"x6"x8' lumber at H & E or someplace? Sharon can give you some money."

"I can do that," David said, "We should have this hole dug out in a couple of more days. If that ground wasn't like concrete, we'd finish sooner, but you know what the soil is like around here."

"Just be sure you spread the dirt out good David," Gary said, "We don't want to be advertising that we're putting in an underground gun safe."

"Did you talk to Damon this morning?" David asked.

"No, why?" Gary responded.

"He came back with 4 M16A2's and bunch of web gear and stuff," David explained.

"Huh, he said he was just going to scout last night," Gary remarked. "I'd better get him to take a night off. We can't have an attic full of stolen military gear."

"They stepped up the patrols, too," David said. "I was talking to Matt and he said that the National Guard had been by about once every half hour."

"Then you guys be really, really careful disposing of that dirt," Gary cautioned.

"I think that I'd better get some extra stuff at H & E," David said, "I've got a feeling that we're going to end up not being able to travel much."

Gary turned on KTPI to see what news was coming out. According to the announcer, federal personnel had finally entered Los Angeles and the death toll was much higher than originally feared. It seemed that the President was finally going to address the nation that night at 9pm eastern, 6pm local. It was about time! Usually the President was on the air minutes or hours after a disaster, but this time, they hadn't heard anything for what, 16 days? Speaking of which, when were they supposed to go to Stater Brothers

again? Gary had sort of lost track of things since the big firefight. "Must be today," he thought, "We last went on the 24th."

◦

Actually, Sharon had already made the trip to Stater Brothers. It was pretty slim pickings and she'd ended up just buying diapers, tp, and instant milk plus whatever there was on the shelves that she could use; mostly pastas, sauces and the like. They didn't have any meat in the store at all. She did manage to get a 25# bag of flour, though and some yeast. Prices had inched higher too, she noticed. They used to joke about getting \$100 worth of food in a couple of shopping bags, especially when they bought meat. Well, she had \$100 worth of items and were it not for the diapers, tp and bag of flour she could have carried everything in one paper bag. There sure seemed to be a lot of National Guard people in town Jeremy said.

Gary got the M1A that Ron had given him and checked it over. It looked to him like he could take the suppressor off his standard M1A and fit it to Ron's rifle. He could put the flashhider off the Super Match on the standard and have himself one Jim Dandy sniper's rifle in the Super Match. Gary was going to have to find someone to use the rifle; he surely wasn't up to hiking all over the country. These last 2 weeks had been a real bear and Gary was really feeling his age. He decided to take a shower, get dressed and go visit Ron, and then Clarence.

Gary put the \$5,000 that he had borrowed from Damon in an envelope and put it on Damon's jeans where he was sure to find it. He stood in the shower a little longer than normal enjoying the luxury of not needing to cut the shower short to preserve propane. He looked in the mirror as he brushed his teeth. That was a nasty looking bruise where the rock had hit him. And he had bags under his eyes that you could park a truck in. He hated to shave and hadn't since Valentine's Day. At least nobody had made any wisecrack about him 'trying' to grow a beard. He didn't think that anyone cared about things like that anymore.

Gary dressed in some clean jeans and a golf shirt. He sure wished he could wear his Laredo boots, but his feet hurt too badly. It was sneakers or sandals and it was winter so sneakers were his only choice. Was he losing weight? That paunch seemed to be disappearing. He strapped on the Vaquero, got a cup of coffee from the kitchen and headed to Ron's. Linda told him Ron and Clarence were upstairs in the 'observation room'.

◦

"Morning guys," Gary greeted them.

"Gary, how are you feeling?" Clarence asked.

"About like I was rode hard and put up wet Clarence," Gary said, "How is that new med-

icine working out?”

“I feel a lot better Gary,” Clarence answered, “Thanks for asking.”

“How are you today Ronald?” Gary asked.

“My head still hurts a little, but a little better, maybe,” Ron answered. “You do sort of look like you were rode hard and put up wet.”

“I switched the suppressor off my standard M1A to your Super Match, Ron, but I think I’m going to have to find someone else to use the rifle; I’m just not up to it,” Gary explained.

“That’s your Super Match now, partner, so you do what you see fit,” Ron said with a tone in his voice.

“David said that Damon came back dragging some more military equipment,” Gary reported. “I thought he was just going to scout last night, but there must have been a change in plans. Sharon said that there wasn’t much at Stater brothers either and that the Guard seemed to be out in force.”

“I’ve been watching Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “They’re coming by about every half hour with one of those Hummers with a machine gun and a truck full of troops.”

“I heard on the radio that Bush is supposed to address the nation at 6pm,” Gary said.

“It’s about time,” Ron said.

“The announcer also said that they finally got into LA,” Gary continued, “And the death toll was higher than anticipated.”

“What about the other cities?” Clarence asked.

“Not a word about them Clarence,” Gary said. “It’s some kind of a news blackout in my opinion.”

“My, my,” Clarence murmured.

“So, once we get all of the military hardware Gar-Bear, what are we going to do with it?” Ron inquired.

“I really don’t know Ron, store it until we come up with a plan, I guess,” Gary commented, “One thing for sure, we don’t want to conduct any operations anywhere in the vicinity of Moon Shadows. We need to keep a low profile. Other than the guards up at the entrance, I think we should pretend to be sheeple.”

“That ought to go over real good with this crowd,” Ron laughed. “Chris was about the only liberal left in the tract and with Matt getting shot, I’d bet that he’s totally converted.”

“Could be, but he’s still a miser and a moocher,” Gary laughed.

“Don’t be so hard on the boy, Gary,” Clarence said, “He’s just Chris and you take what you get.”

“Did they put in any more foxholes?” Gary asked.

“Two more on each side Gar,” Ron said, but if the Guard decided to rush this place, we’d be up a creek.”

“That’s why I said we should be acting like sheeple Ron,” Gary explained, “We don’t want to give them a reason. I’m putting in a new gun safe to store all of the military hardware. It should be done in a couple of days.”

“Under the patio?” Clarence asked.

“Nope, I think I came up with a better idea this time,” Gary said, “But only time will tell.”

o

This idea of acting like sheeple was going to be a bitter pill. None of the three men were used to backing down from trouble when it came their way, especially Ron. The three of them sat around and visited for a while and then Gary saw David pull in and decided to go home and see how he’d done at H & E. He bade Ron and Clarence goodbye and walked home. David and his boys were busy unloading the lumber from the back of his van.

“This was the last trip Gary,” David said, “The National Guard was there taking names and writing down everything everyone was buying.”

“No problem David, I think we have enough to complete the project,” Gary replied.

“How’s it going?”

David walked over to the entrance to the new storage area and called down.

“Josh, how is it going?”

Josh climbed the 4-step ladder and came out of the hole.

“Dad, I think we are ready to put in some of the bracing,” he said, “The room is about half done.”

“Gary, I think we’ll work all night on this and try to finish it up,” David said.

“What are you going to do with the dirt?” Gary asked.

“You always wanted a garden spot behind the shed, right?” David smiled.

“I guess so,” Gary said. Why not, the grass didn’t grow back there anyway. Gary’s sprinkler system had gotten screwed up at one time and it was bare ground anyway. It would have been nice to have some steer manure to mix with the dirt; Gary wondered if they dared risk a trip to Walmart. Maybe it was worth a try.

“Do you feel up to making a trip to Walmart David?” Gary asked.

“I suppose, why?” David asked back.

“Pick up a few bags of steer manure to mix in with the dirt,” Gary explained. “It will make it more convincing and we really can plant a garden when it warms up.”

“Do you have any seeds?” David asked.

“There are 6 #10 cans in the refrigerator in the garage, David,” Gary said. “Each can is a complete seed pack, so yes, I have seeds.”

“Where did you get those?” David asked.

“Walton Feed,” Gary said. “On second thought, get all the steer manure you can haul, we’ll plant the whole backyard come spring.”

“Planning ahead?” David asked.

“Sharon couldn’t get much at Stater Brothers today, so I’d have to say yes,” Gary answered. “It never hurts to prepare a little.”

“I’ve been wondering about something,” David said. “Since the feds were able to get in- to LA and the utilities are back up, why haven’t they been moving the refugees back to the San Fernando Valley?”

“I don’t know David,” Gary mused, “That might be the \$64 question. Maybe we’ll find out something at 6pm tonight when Bush addresses the nation on radio. Something is going on and it’s not right. That’s why we’re digging the hole under the house and Damon is out ‘shopping’. I know that Derek is pretty concerned. Damon says Derek is about ready to bug-out and head to California, so that should tell you something.”

Preparations – Chapter 22 – Prepare ye the way of the Lord

After David left for Walmart, Gary went into the office and checked his email. He had a message from Derek. It was in the book code, but this time Gary didn't have to look up the translation, he immediately recognized the passage because of his love for the old Rock Opera Godspell. The message was 2+1+3+3. The problem was that Gary wasn't sure what the message meant. The passage was from the 3rd Chapter of Matthew, and it was the entire 3rd Verse, "For this was He that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight." Maybe Damon would know; Gary would ask him when he woke up.

Gary had a peanut butter sandwich and some Fritos for lunch and David was back by the time he'd finished.

"How did you do?" Gary asked.

"Bought them out, but it wasn't much," David said, "Apparently a lot of people are planning on gardens this year. It was a good thing you had seed, too. There wasn't a single package of seed on the shelves."

"How many bags did you get?" Gary asked.

"31," David said.

"Good. Look, I'd better wake up Damon, I got a somewhat cryptic message from Derek," Gary said.

Gary shook Damon awake and told him he had a message from Derek. Would Damon get around and come to the office, please? Damon was in the office like a flash. He looked at the message and then checked the properties of the message to see exactly when it had been sent.

"I got to get around and go, Dad," Damon said.

"What's this Prepare ye the way of the Lord, crap?" Gary asked.

"Derek is on his way. I have to meet him in Needles," Damon said.

"Slow down and explain it to me," Gary insisted.

"Ok. Derek got a buddy to cut him 2 sets of phony orders, transferring him to California," Damon started. "He's going to rip a Humvee and fuel trailer and he and Mary and the kids are coming across country, disguised as a two people being transferred to California. She's going to be a widowed Captain with 2 kids and he's going to be her driver. I'm supposed to be the representative from her new post waiting to meet them and escort them to the post."

“How are you going to manage all of that?” Gary asked.

“I stole and stashed a hummer last night Dad,” Damon said. “I have a SSgt uniform and everything I need, plus a fake military ID, courtesy of Derek.”

“I wanted to ask you about that Damon,” Gary said, “I thought you were just going scouting last night.”

“I’m a great scout Dad, and you know our motto, right?” Damon smirked.

“What, Be Prepared?” Gary asked.

“Exactly. I’m just a chip off the old blockhead,” Damon said.

“Get going, I want to see my grandkids,” Gary said.

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“Gary, we’re going to need some sort of permanent ladder into the room,” David said.

“Go get Chris’s extension ladder and cut it down to size,” Gary said. “If he gives you any crap, tell him to come see me for some 5.56x45 ammo.”

Five minutes later, Chris was knocking on the door.

“I understand you need my ladder,” Chris said.

“Yeah,” Gary replied.

“It will cost you a case of ammo,” Chris said.

“We only need ½ of the ladder, so I’ll only give you ½ case of ammo,” Gary countered.

“But the ladder isn’t any good without both halves,” Chris protested.

“Yeah right, you’re going to paint your house this week and need the ladder,” Gary said, “Take it or leave it Chris. That’s \$125 worth of ammo for half of a \$60 ladder.”

“I’ll take it,” Chris said. (It was a used ladder someone had given him.)

“I thought so,” Gary dryly remarked. (Gary knew about the ladder.)

Gary was pretty excited about Derek being on the way to California and he walked down to tell Ronald. Ronald was asleep in his easy chair in front of the window. Gary turned to leave and...

“Where the hell are you going?” Ron rumbled, “You just got here.”

“Sorry, I didn’t mean to wake you,” Gary mumbled.

“I wasn’t sleeping Gar-Bear, what’s up?” Ron remarked.

“Derek is on his way to California,” Gary gushed.

“How the hell is he going to pull that one off?” Ron quizzed.

“Damon and he have some elaborate scheme worked out,” Gary said, “But I think it is risky.”

“Don’t sell them short Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “From what I hear that Derek is pretty sharp.”

“Damon isn’t the jerk he pretends to be either,” Gary said, “He said he was scouting last night, but I think he was actually getting ready for the stunt. Anyway, just wanted you to know.”

“How is the hole coming?” Ron asked.

“What hole?” Gary asked.

“The hole you’re digging under your house,” Ron said.

“Where did you get the idea I was digging a hole under the house?” Gary asked.

“Well, it was about the only thing you hadn’t done in your stories,” Ron remarked.

“I thought you didn’t read my stories,” Gary said.

“Are you kidding?” Ron laughed, “I wanted to see how badly you portrayed me.”

“And?” Gary said.

“I guess that I don’t have any secrets,” Ron shook his head.

“You’ll have to remember, we’ve had our act on the road since 1995,” Gary said, “I just listened and kept track. Sometimes you even told the same story twice.”

“Is Damon leaving in broad daylight?” Ron asked.

“Just watch for the NCO walking towards the gate Ron,” Gary said, “It will be Damon.”

“Are you coming over here to listen to the address?” Ron asked.

“Might as well, Sharon doesn’t want to listen to it,” Gary said. “See you about 10 minutes before 6.”

◦

Gary wasn’t too worried about having the hole under the house. First they had to suspect him before they would do anything. And, although they could probably find the hole with ground penetrating radar, they’d have to have a reason to look. It was like the thing about the generator. He could get an Onan and he couldn’t get the Generac. The generator worked just fine anyway. Ground penetrating radar didn’t concern him one bit. If it got to the point that they were searching to that extent, he was probably toast anyway. Where did anyone get the idea that the government was going to observe civil liberties in the middle of a crisis? Crap, they’d just kick in your door and arrest you if they suspected anything, and that meant anything!

All those Executive Orders and things like the USA Patriot Act had virtually stripped the citizens in the US of most of their civil liberties anyway. Take that stupid Supreme Court case about the Pledge of Allegiance for example. The court hadn’t really decided the case, they’d just found that the guy lacked standing, meaning that he didn’t have the right to sue on behalf of the child. That begged the question, now didn’t it? All because they’d left the word God out of the Constitution. The first 2 sentences of the Declaration of Independence were clear:

When in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident:

That all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness; that, to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness.

Gee, there was God and Creator, right together. And, what was that business about, that to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, **DERIVING THEIR JUST POWERS FROM THE CONSENT OF THE GOVERNED?** Somewhere in the whole process people had forgotten their past and those who forgot the past were condemned to repeat it. *Whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these*

ends, IT IS THE RIGHT OF THE PEOPLE TO ALTER OR TO ABOLISH IT, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their safety and happiness.”

Yep, that's what the Declaration of Independence said!

Gary was in the mood for some corned beef hash for supper and if Amy wasn't good, he was going to kick his daughter's butt. His email address was still the same, gdott@sbcglobal.net and anyone with a really good idea could always send him an email, now couldn't they? And, they didn't even need to use the Bible code.

It was getting late and it was about time to head down to Ron's to listen to what Bush had to say. Somehow, he had a sneaking suspicion that it was mostly going to be untrue. If Derek were right, that wouldn't necessarily be Dubya's fault, either. He'd have to listen very carefully to see if there were any hidden messages in the speech. Maybe if Bush were being forced to say things that he didn't want to say, he'd do like the Vietnam POW's and send a message. One guy had sent a message by blinking his eyes in Morse code. That sure as hell wasn't John Kerry either.

It was almost funny; between Bush and Kerry, they'd spent about \$300 million trying to get elected. And, most of that money went to smear each other. Why didn't they both just stand up and make an announcement that, "the other candidate is a butthead" and spend the money on something worthwhile like a new school or something?

Linda told Gary Ron and Clarence were still in the 'observation room' and that she'd bring up some coffee in a minute.

"Hey Gary," Clarence said, "Good to see you."

"Howdy partner," Ron echoed.

"Well are we ready for this?" Gary asked. "Listen for any hidden messages guys, if Bush is doing this against his own will, he might try to tell the public in some way."

"Do you really believe that he's not in power, Gary?" Clarence asked.

"I really don't know what to think anymore Clarence," Gary said, "We could anticipate al-Qaeda doing what they did, assuming it was al-Qaeda, but for the government not to get into those cities sooner is unbelievable. And not moving the refugees back to the San Fernando Valley really makes me wonder what is really going on. Why did they try to stop her and her husband from going to Denver? I sure hope that they made it the second time in that H2 she bought. And, why would Derek be bugging out and coming here, of all places, unless something was really, really wrong?"

Preparations – Chapter 23 – The Speech

“You just said really 4 times in the last 4 sentences,” Ron laughed.

“Really?” Gary asked.

“Ladies and Gentlemen, the President of the United States,” the announcer said.

My fellow Americans, Bush began.

On February 14th this country was viciously attacked by forces of a foreign nation or nations. Some would have you believe that this attack was perpetrated by al Qaeda and those answering to the terrorist, Osama bin Laden. At first your government operated under that presumption, but arrests of several persons believed to be responsible for these terrible acts has now led your government to believe that others were responsible.

Your government now believes the actions to be the work of separatists who would divide this country and destroy its government. As a result, martial law was declared and FEMA relocation camps are being set up around the country. Your government will seek out and incarcerate those responsible. Your government asks only your cooperation in this effort.

Some of you may have wondered why your government did not enter the 6 cities attacked with nuclear weapons sooner. The simple truth is that your government was not prepared for an attack of this magnitude. Much of the equipment needed to enter the cities and rescue the injured was destroyed in those very attacks. Perhaps some of you know of the rule of sevens. Radioactivity decays at a predicable rate and in 7 times 7 times 7 hours, that's 343 hours, radioactivity decays to a point where it is safe to enter a bombed area. Your government determined that it was necessary to wait those 14 and a fraction days.

Some of you may also be wondering why refugees have not been returned to their homes. Your government has determined that these refugees include large numbers of the very separatists who would divide this country and destroy its government. Consequently, your government has refrained from allowing the refugees to return until the separatists can be identified and removed from their ranks.

The pipelines and electrical substations destroyed by the separatists have been repaired and all of you should now have natural gas, water and electricity. To prevent further attacks by these separatist elements in our society, your government has found it necessary to implement several controls.

One. Travel will be restricted to a 20-mile radius from your home.

Two. The powers of the Federal Emergency Management Agency have been extended to include full police powers.

Three. Internet communications and telephone communications are being fully monitored by your government.

Four. Posse Comitatus is hereby suspended.

Five. The Writ of Habeas Corpus is hereby suspended.

Six. Commencing immediately, all food will be rationed by your government.

My fellow Americans, I had a revelation on the 6th and 8th days of this crisis. The greatest danger to American is not from without, but from within. Your government is working to restore order, and requests your continued cooperation.

Good Night.

“Huh,” Clarence said, “What do you make of that?”

“Bush is a prisoner and except for a single line or two, that speech was contrived,” Gary said.

“What do you mean partner?” Ron asked.

“In the first place, it was always ‘your government’ and not I,” Gary said. “He only used I one time in that speech. Hmm, I wonder. Ron do you have a Bible handy?”

“Sure. Lyn,” Ron shouted, “Bring me a Bible.”

“In the second place, the speech reeked,” Gary continued, “There were several obvious lies.”

“Here you go Ron,” Linda said, handing Ron the Bible.”

“What do you want me to do with this Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“Look up Revelations, uh Chapter 6, uh Verse 8,” Gary said. “He did say ‘I had a revelation on the 6th and 8th days of this crisis’, didn’t he?”

“That’s right, Gary,” Clarence confirmed.

“Here you go guys,” Ron said, “*And I looked, and behold, a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.*”

“Holy crap,” Clarence said.

“Any doubt in anyone’s mind now?” Gary asked. “I’d say that there has been a coup. I don’t know if it happened as a result of the attacks or the attacks were just part of the coup; but, I am convinced there was a coup.”

“This isn’t one of those TSHTF deals Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “This is TEOTWAWKI,”

“Only if we let it be Ronald,” Gary replied.

“What are three old men, two with bad hearts and one with serious diabetes going to do to change it?” Ron asked.

“Everything we can partner,” Gary smiled. “The gloves are off. Bush said it once in his first term, something to the effect that you’re for us or against us, or something like that (*Every nation, in every region, now has a decision to make. Either you are with us, or you are with the terrorists.*). Derek’s splitting proves the point as far as I’m concerned. When he realized that evil was in charge, he got out. The rest of these National Guard troops have the same choice, as far as I’m concerned.”

“That’s pretty harsh isn’t it?” Clarence asked.

“You’re always saying that Clarence,” Gary said. “Darn it. It’s black and white. There aren’t any shades of gray any more. You are either a Patriot or you’re not. You are either for Freedom or you’re against it. It is one nation, under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.”

“Where do we start?” Ron asked quietly.

“We start by acting like sheeple in the light and like lions in the dark,” Gary said.

“How do you propose to do that Gary,” Clarence asked.

“Wait for my boys to get here,” Gary said, “Then we will start. In the meantime, keep your guns loaded and your powder dry.”

Actually, Gary had several ideas in mind, including a trip to Fountain Valley, CA. A company named Surefire had its offices there. Most people thought of lights when they thought of Surefire. Gary thought of the Surefire M4FA, a can, or if you prefer, a suppressor. Intended for use on the M-4 Carbine, the can also fit nicely on an M16 and the FA referred to Fast Attach.

Brought out in 2003 or 2004, Gary couldn’t remember, the can reduced sound by 30db. More importantly, it had a guaranteed life of 30,000 rounds. How many barrels could last for 30,000 rounds? Of course, there were the other Surefire products too, and they would play an important part in his plans, but Gary envisioned a rapid strike force, equipped with all kinds of exotic things like the military night vision equipment, etc. He

had Surefire suppressors on some of his rifles and they worked as advertised.

If they could put together a small force of skilled operators, they could go sneaking around the Valley, the state and perhaps later, even the nation. It probably wouldn't be easy, but Gary figured that some of those smart folks who realized that the government wasn't doing what it should be doing and bolted from the Guard in disgust might be possible candidates. That was going to be up to Derek and Damon. Ron, Clarence and he were just going to do what they could to support the small force.

With any kind of luck, the boys and Derek's family should be in Palmdale within 24 hours. Gary had driven from Iowa to Palmdale non-stop more than once. If Derek had driven straight through, he should already be in Arizona, assuming everything went okay. Maybe in the morning, the family would be fully reassembled. Gary saw his neighbor Dave backing out of the driveway.

"You take care Gary, I won't be back for a while," Dave said.

"Oh, where are you headed?" Gary asked.

"Dana asked me to get her and the girls out of California," Dave answered.

"How long will you be gone?" Gary asked.

"It could be months," Dave said, "Or I might not be back at all."

"Dave, my son and his wife are arriving tomorrow and..." Gary started to ask.

Dave turned off the car, took the house key off the ring and handed it to Gary.

"Just keep the place clean," Dave said, restarting the car and pulling out before Gary could even say thanks.

Dave lived in a very nicely kept 2-story home just like the homes Ron and Clarence lived in. Fortunately Sharon and Amy had crossed swords one too many times, again, Amy and her brood had moved in with Lorrie and David; that was another 2-story home with lots of room. Gary was getting ready to boot Damon out of his bedroom into the spare bedroom, just as soon as Damon got back from Needles.

Of course, there was Murphy's Law to consider, but Derek and especially Damon were on a first name basis with Mr. Murphy and if anyone could pull this stunt off, it would be those two. Damon's IQ was about the same as Gary's (none of your business) but Derek was the really smart one with an IQ of 168 and all the common sense in the world to go with those brains.

Damon was more like his Dad, not stupid but short as hell on common sense at times. Gary's only saving grace was that he had done everything wrong at least once and had,

until recently, a very good memory. Gary may have lost his edge, but he made up for it in other ways. Tony had been a good teacher, rest his soul, he had taught Gary all about conniving and lying and cheating your best friend out of his last dollar if that's what it took to get along. "Nice guy that Tony," Gary thought, "I wonder whatever became of the body? Maybe it's at the dump with the rest of the trash."

If Palmdale hadn't turned into such a little police state, it would have been a nice place to live. The problem was that the Guard was out in force and so many people were unemployed that they were being forced to seek assistance from the government, just like the refugees from the Los Angeles area. Gary had talked to some of the folks who ventured out of the housing tract and they were telling how more and more homes were empty and how more and more people were in the refugee camps. Had those refugee camps become relocations centers? If so, KTPI hadn't said anything about it. Come to think about it, KTPI wasn't talking about much anymore. It was a country western station and before Valentine's Day, most of the airtime was music. After that, for about 10 days, it had been almost 24-hour news. But recently, they were back to music almost all of the time, even more than before Valentine's Day.

Gary took his insulin and pills and played FreeCell on his computer until he got sleepy. Tomorrow was another day and who knew what it would bring?

04Mar05...

How about his family? They pulled in around 10am, Damon leading in his stolen Hummer and Derek, Mary and the kids following in their stolen Hummer. What a bunch of car thieves he'd raised. As much as he loved Damon, and of that there could be no doubt, Gary had a sweet spot in his heart for Derek. It was probably because Derek was his own individual and unlike either Gary or his first wife. Anyway, after a brief family reunion, Gary led Derek, Mary, Elizabeth and Joshua over to Dave's house.

"Dave gave me the key to his house for you to use," Gary explained. "He was taking his ex and 2 daughters out of California and didn't know when, or if, he'd be back. There should be everything you need, except food. Dave said to tell you to keep it clean."

"I hope he made it Dad," Derek said, "We would have never made it without the ruse."

"Are they going to come looking for you?" Gary asked.

"I hope not," Derek said, "But we will need to dispose of that Hummer and trailer because that will be a dead giveaway."

"We'll get Damon to do something with them Derek," Gary said. "Come over to our house for meals today and we'll transfer some food over here this afternoon."

"Ok, but we need to get some rest, how about we see you for supper?" Derek suggested.

“Want anything special?” Gary asked, “Or will MRE’s do?”

The look he got for that one told a big story!

Preparations – Chapter 24 – Whodunit?

Gary had let Damon get some sleep, but he made him move to the guest room and told him he was going to have to dispose of those Hummers and trailer tonight. Gary walked down to Ron's to confirm that the boys had made it back ok. Not surprisingly, Ron and Clarence were in the observation room.

"Didn't see any bullet holes," Ron said, "So they must be ok. Where did you put them up?"

"I figured you know that too, you old busybody," Gary teased.

"Gary put them in Dave's house across the street Ron," Clarence announced.

Oops, wrong busybody.

"Damon is going to ditch the vehicles tonight and then I'll get them to working on a plan," Gary remarked.

"How is the hole coming?" Clarence asked.

"Et tu Brute?" Gary said.

"Huh?" Clarence said.

"Shakespeare, Clarence, Gary's showing off again," Ron smirked. "How is the hole coming?"

"Done. Stuff is in it and it's buttoned up," Gary answered.

"How big did you make it?" Ron asked.

"8'x8'x8'," Gary replied.

"You'll have to be careful that they don't use ground penetrating radar to find the hole," Ron said.

"Jeez, is everybody fixated on ground penetrating radar?" Gary snapped.

"No, some of us are fixated on the brand of generators you and Ron bought," Clarence laughed.

"Only because you didn't buy an Onan," Gary said.

"Look, you guys remember me telling you know those Surefire suppressors we bought, right?" Gary asked.

“No, I don’t believe you ever mentioned it to me,” Ron said, winking at Clarence.

“Anyway, Surefire is located in Fountain Valley,” Gary said.

“Our Fountain Valley?” Ron asked.

“Yeah Ron, our Fountain Valley,” Gary agreed, “Anyway, I figured on getting the boys to make a trip down there and look for both suppressors and some lights.”

“Don’t forget batteries, Gar-Bear, they’re hard to find,” Ron prompted.

“Yes Ronald, is this my plan or yours?” Gary smarted back.

“Sorry.”

“Anyway, once we have the suppressors and tactical lights and such, we can start to acquire weapons with night vision scopes and take some of that night vision equipment from the guard,” Gary explained. “When we have enough equipment for a small force we can recruit more people and after that build up to 2 or 3 squads.”

“So you’re going to recruit deserters and the disenchanteds?” Clarence asked.

“Exactly,” Gary said.

“Just make sure they don’t run in a ringer on you,” Ron warned.

“Good advice, thanks,” Gary said.

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At supper everyone got caught up on the family news; the subject of what was going on in the US was never brought up. After supper Gary and the boys moved to the office for a smoke and some serious conversation. Gary had a million questions but decided not to bring them up. He wanted to know what Derek knew that he didn’t and guessed that would come up quickly, but it didn’t. First Derek wanted to know all about Damon’s trip and he actually took notes and asked questions. Then Derek talked about all of the motorcycles in Dave’s garage and storage shed; apparently Derek had been exploring. After that the matter of Dave’s machine shop in his garage came up.

“Darn it, Derek,” Gary said out of frustration, “I need to know what’s going on in the country that got you to bolt for California.”

“Simple Dad, there was coup in Washington,” Derek said. “The Colonel in charge of our outfit got called to Mt. Weather and was basically given a choice, go along with them or die. He wasn’t willing to go along, but figured discretion was the better part of valor and

pretended to go along.”

“We figured that out from Bush’s speech,” Gary said, “But who did it?”

“A bunch of ultra-liberals,” Derek replied.

“You mean the Kennedy, Schumer, Clinton crowd?” Gary asked.

“No, those three got killed when the bomb went off,” Derek replied. “I’m not totally sure who is in charge, but I have my suspicions. So, have you figured out what we’re going to do and where we’re going to start?”

“Yeah, but Damon has to dump those vehicles tonight,” Gary said, “That’s the first order of business.”

“Ron told me about an abandoned mineshaft out in the desert to the east,” Damon offered, “He said it was big enough to park a Mack truck in. We’ll take Derek’s Hummer and trailer out there and stuff the mine entrance full of tumbleweeds. In a pinch, we can always go back and get it. I’m going to park the Hummer I borrowed in the garage of one of those old abandoned houses down the street. We might need it again.”

“Sounds risky to me, but whatever you say,” Gary went along. “I have another project for the two of you as soon as you can get on it.”

“Like I said, do you have a plan?” Derek repeated.

“Yeah, we’re going to build our own little team of strikers and just plain harass the Guard and the like to the limit,” Gary answered without further explanation.

“Now, about Dave’s stuff, Derek,” Gary said. “Dave’s a machinist and over the last 17 years has been putting that shop together. He had big plans at one time about quitting his job and starting a business, but it didn’t work out. As for the mountain bikes, last I knew he had 31 or 32 of them and they all run.”

“Don’t forget my Harley in your shed,” Damon said.

“And Damon’s Harley in my shed. Anyway, I want the two of you to make a trip to Fountain Valley tomorrow night,” Gary said. “Find Surefire and get all the 5.56 and 7.62 suppressors and M16 and M1A adapters you can find. Also, pick up some of the LED lights and plenty of batteries. After that, Damon and you can go out and pick up more military hardware. He’ll explain how he’s been doing that.”

“Ok Dad,” Derek said.

“Oh, one other thing boys,” Gary said. “Ron bought all of his 5.56x45 ammo at Walmart a mile down the road. Think you could get in there and empty out the ammo?”

“We’ll do that tonight, if we have time,” Derek said. “I suppose we’d better get going.”

“Not yet, I have something for you Derek,” Gary said. Gary went to the cabinet where he stored his guns and got the Super Match M1A and LBE.

“Try this on for size,” Gary said handing Derek the rifle.

“Jeez,” Derek said, “Where did you get this?”

“Ron gave the rifle to me and I put on a Surefire suppressor,” Gary explained. “That’s a 3rd gen Russian day/night scope. The instructions and other parts are in the utility pouch.”

Gary could see that Derek was pleased with the rifle. Derek didn’t say anything, it wasn’t his way, but he had a grin etched on his face. Gary hated to push them right into the fray, so quickly, but there was a lot to do. The longer this thing went on, the harder, he assumed, it was going to be to get things done. The boys, Mary and the kids left to go to Derek’s new home and Gary took his meds and went to bed. He was exhausted.

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05Mar05...

Gary was up early. He stumbled down to the kitchen for his first cup of coffee and Derek was sitting at the kitchen table drinking coffee.

“What’s up?” Gary asked while he got his coffee.

“Just wanted to fill you in,” Derek said. “We ditched the Hummer and trailer and stopped by the Walmart. Damon pulled in bold as you please and told the two Guard types watching the place that we were there to impound the military ammo. The Dorks bought it and even helped him load the ammo into his Hummer and trailer. Anyway, we got 63,000 rounds of that CCI 5.56×45.”

“Where did you put it?” Gary asked.

“Downstairs,” Derek said.

“Huh, I didn’t hear a thing,” Gary said.

“We heard you,” Derek laughed. “You snore loud enough to wake the dead. “I’m going to get some sleep and we’ll head for Fountain Valley after dark. Do you have a map or something?”

“Got an old road atlas, Derek,” Gary said, “But Damon knows where Fountain Valley is,

he made deliveries there when he was driving truck.”

“I’ll see you tomorrow morning,” Derek said, yawning.

Sixty-three cases of 5.56×45 ammo put them way ahead of the curve. Gary decided to clean up and walk down to Ron’s and bring him up to speed.

“Morning partner,” Ron said, “What’s new?”

“They put the Hummer in the mine you told Damon about and cleaned out Walmart of their 5.56×45 ammo,” Gary reported.

“Did Derek say anything more about what is going on in Washington?” Ron wanted to know.

“Bad news Ron,” Gary smiled, “Your girlfriend is dead. Kennedy and Schumer, too.”

“So, who is behind this?” Ron asked.

“Derek didn’t say Ron,” Gary admitted. “He said he had his suspicions, but wouldn’t give out a name.”

“Probably John Kerry,” Ron proposed.

“I don’t know, and would rather not speculate,” Gary said. “Anyway, they’re going to our Fountain Valley tonight on a little scrounging expedition.”

“Tell them to be careful,” Ron said.

“Oh, I almost forgot,” Gary said, “They went by Walmart last night. Picked up 63 cases of 5.56×45. Even got the guards to help them load it into the Humvee.”

“You just told me that. Did you decide what you were going to do with the Super Match?’ Ron asked.

“Gave it to Derek partner,” Gary smiled, “That boy can really shoot.”

“Nice to know you found it a good home,” Ron nodded.

Preparations – Chapter 25 – Communications

Just about then, Clarence joined them.

“Found what a good home?” he asked.

“Oh, Gary gave the Super Match to Derek,” Ron explained.

“I’ve been thinking guys,” Clarence said, “It sure is funny how fast they got the utilities back up and running. Kinda makes you think that they weren’t as damaged as we were led to believe. And, another thing, I’ve been watching and listening to Presidential speeches for years. Never saw or heard one where the media didn’t go into a feeding frenzy picking apart the speech word by word. Last night after Bush gave his speech, they started playing a Willie Nelson tune. Didn’t have one word to say about the speech.”

“For all we know Clarence, that speech might have been taped,” Gary said. But, it had to have been at least 8 or 9 days after Valentine’s Day or Bush would have never gotten away with that 6th and 8th day bit.”

“I sure wish we knew who was behind this,” Clarence said. “Any ideas?”

“Liberals,” Ron announced, “And it wasn’t Kennedy, Schumer or Clinton from what Derek told Gary. My money is on Kerry.”

“Hell Ron,” Clarence said, “This was way beyond anything Kerry was capable of, it couldn’t have been him.”

They took a few minutes and filled Clarence in on all that Gary and Ron knew and suspected. By the time they had finished the conversation, they had a list of a half dozen names of who might be behind the current situation. Gary had one name in particular that he was going to run by Derek the next morning and see how Derek reacted. Clarence wanted to know more about what Gary had in mind for a long-term plan.

“Clarence, I figure that some of those National Guard boys won’t take too kindly to that speech,” Gary explained. “Now, if we can get say 3 dozen or so of them on our side, we might be able to get them to help us out. Those that want to just get out can join up with Damon and Derek. That trailer park next door, Grecian Isles, looks pretty empty. And, there’s that bunch down at Palmdale High School. Remember that they were segregating the prepared folks from the unprepared folks and putting the prepared ones in that stadium? I bet we can find a bunch of like-minded people there.”

They visited a while longer and then Gary left. He had something he wanted to do in the worst way. He got David to bring him 3 cases of the Walmart 5.56x45 ammo from the ‘basement’ and put them on his beat up 2-wheeler and headed for Chris and Patti’s. Chris came to the door.

“Brought you something cheapskate,” Gary smiled.

“Gee, tanks (not thanks, tanks),” Chris said.

“I need one of the car radios, a charger and a scanner,” Gary said.

“Gee, I don’t know,” Chris said.

“Look cheapskate,” Gary reminded Chris, “I only loaned you those radios back in ‘96, I didn’t give them to you. I need one for our OP. Ron can’t get around much and he is sitting there in front of his window 24/7 keeping an eye on things.”

“Seeing you put it that way,” Chris said, “Ok.”

Gary pushed the 2-wheeler back home and got several packages of AA cells for the scanner. He took everything to Ron’s.

“Here’s a business frequency handheld and a scanner partner,” he told Ron, “Now you can communicate with everyone.”

“I don’t have one of those GMRS/FRS radios,” Ron observed, “Do you suppose Dick could spare one?”

“I’ll ask him Ron,” Gary said. “I’d also like to come up with some Ham equipment. We could make this room into a regular command center. It has a great view and should be ideal. Guess I’ll have to send the boys down to the Valley.”

Dick was more than happy to loan Gary a GMRS/FRS radio. He appreciated having Ron up in that room basically 24/7 keeping an eye on things. Dick had an old pair of German binoculars that his dad had brought back from Europe in 1945. He gave them to Gary for Ron to use. With his position and a good pair of binoculars, Ron could keep an eye on the traffic up on Palmdale Boulevard to the north. Gary went back to Ron’s and gave him the radio and the binoculars. Ron had gotten John to help and had moved a folding table to the room.

He had also dug out a map of Palmdale and pinned it on the wall. He seemed to really be getting into the spirit of things and although he still had the left arm in a sling because of the pacemaker, was getting around pretty good for an ugly old fart. That was the downside to the pacemaker surgery. In order to insure that the leads to his heart didn’t move, Ron had to keep his left arm in a sling for 2 weeks. John had pitched in and was helping Ron run the little OP and command center. Things were definitely looking good in this department.

Gary had a bowl of soup and sat down in his recliner. The next thing he knew, Sharon was calling him for supper. He was still ½ full from the soup and only ate a little, more

out of politeness than hunger. His head didn't hurt anymore, but he seemed to need more sleep. Maybe it was the lingering effects from the blow to his head or maybe he was just getting old. The boys were getting ready to leave and he told them to be careful. And, since it came to mind, he suggested that if they had time, they should stop by the HRO in Anaheim and see what they could get in the way of Ham radios, antennas and cable. Damon said that Fountain Valley and Anaheim weren't that far apart, so they would see what they could do; he didn't want to be that far from home a lot. Gary about ½ had a headache so he took his meds early and turned in.

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06Mar05...

Because he'd gone to bed so early, Gary was already up when Damon and Derek came in just after dawn. And, he had a terrible headache. They had very good luck in Fountain Valley. They carried in several armloads of the suppressors, adapters, the LED lights and batteries. All of that material went straight to the hole. Damon had 2 Yaesu HF rigs, an ICOM receiver, a Yaesu receiver, several antennas, an assortment of RG-213U cables, the list went on and on and the pile grew higher and higher as they hauled all of the equipment into the living room and piled it up. It looked like the boys hadn't known what to get and had just cleaned out the store, or a good portion of it. Considering how poor HRO's inventory usually was, probably the entire store. The boys took a minute to fill him in and headed for the sack.

Gary hoped Ron was awake. It was awfully early, but when he looked up at Ron's window, Ron waved to him.

"Shhh, everyone's still sleeping," Ron whispered. They went up to the OP and Ron closed the door so they could talk. "How did they do?" Ron asked.

"Hell Ron, those boys of mine must be natural born thieves," Gary laughed. "Half my living room is stacked with Ham equipment and we have LED lights, batteries and suppressors running out our ears. Do you have another folding table, or should I bring one down?"

"Better bring one Gar-Bear, this is the only one I have," Ron replied.

"Ok I'll have David bring down the 8' table and a couple of folding chairs partner," Gary acknowledged. "This is coming together better than I thought. If I can get Dick to put up the antennas, we should have a radio shack set up for you before the end of the day. Which reminds me, I noticed some GMRS/FRS radios in that pile of equipment they brought back, so we can return Dick's radio to him."

"What's it like out there?" Ron asked, "Did they fill you in?"

"Man, they were tired, so I didn't ask," Gary said. "They can take the night off tonight

and we'll get together and talk it over. I thought that they'd have to go out tonight for the Ham equipment anyway, so I guess we're a day ahead of schedule."

"Did you get any receivers?" Ron asked.

"Two, a Yaesu and an ICOM," Gary said, "And some base station scanners."

"It might be nice to put that table right here in front of the window," Ron said. "We could put the radios on each side and I could watch and listen at the same time."

"I guess I'd better bring you a plastic floor mat and one of my swivel office chairs," Gary said, "You are going to be busier than a one-armed paper hanger."

"You have the one-armed part right Gar-Bear," Ron laughed, "I'll sure be glad when I can dump this sling. You look a little off today, are you feeling ok?"

"No, I'm not partner," Gary said, "It's the headache; I got it back today. I'm going back home and lay down for a while. Give me Dick's radio and I'll give it back to him."

Walking out Ron's front door, Gary spied Dick tinkering with his pickup. He walked over to return the radio.

"Morning Gary," Dick said.

"Morning Dick. I have your radio," Gary said.

"I was in no rush to get it back," Dick observed.

"We picked up some more last night. Say, are you free today?" Gary asked.

"Unfortunately yes, what do you need?" Dick inquired.

"I need you to mount 3 antennas on Ron's house and 3 on my house, Dick," Gary explained.

"What kind of antennas?" Dick asked.

"A Diamond D-130-J, a Comet tri-bander and a Gap Titan DX for each house," Gary said. "I've never heard of the Gap, but it covers 10 meters to 80 meters, so I guess it will be ok."

"Did you get some radios, too?" Dick asked.

"You need something?" Gary asked.

"A scanner," Dick said.

“You’re in luck, they brought back several,” Gary said.

“How many D-130-J’s did they get?” Dick asked.

“4 or 5,” Gary said.

“Well, if you could part with a scanner and a D-130-J,” Dick said, “I’d put in all the stuff for free.”

“Come on down and look through the pile, partner,” Gary said, “There’s more equipment than you will ever want.”

Dick followed Gary back to the house. He took a D-130-J, a Bearcat scanner and a length of pre-wired RG-8 cable. Gary told him to come and go as he pleased and to use the RG-213U cable on Ron’s and his installations. Gary picked out a Yaesu VR-5000 scanning receiver, a Yaesu FT-1000D transceiver, an ICOM IC-910H with the 1200Mhz option, a Cobra 148NW ST and 2 digital 24-hour clocks. He cleared off the desk and set up the equipment. He set one clock to local time and the other to GMT (Zulu). He plugged everything into a spare surge protector and plugged in the surge protector. He went back to the living room, found mikes for the radios and hooked those up.

Next, Gary selected an ICOM IC-R8500 receiver, a Yaesu FT-1000D transceiver, an ICOM IC-910H (with the option), and two digital clocks for Ron. David and the boys carried the table, radios and clocks to Ron’s and Gary brought the microphones and pushed the chair.

It didn’t take long to set up the table and install the radio equipment just like Ron wanted it. Ron was going to have to do a lot of reading to get competent with the radio equipment, but then, Ron had a lot of ‘free’ time. Gary still wanted a StarDuster Base Antenna for his CB radio, but didn’t know where to find one. He also wanted 1000-watt linear amplifiers for the CB’s but again, didn’t know where to find them. This was obviously a job for #1 son (Damon). They had drug back a pile of the tripods and 10’x1¼” mast sections. Dick was on the roof of Ron’s house and Gary walked down and hollered up to him.

“Dick, please put in 4 tripods, not 3, we’re going to mount some CB Base antennas.”

Dick waived and continued to install the tripods. It looked like he’d have Ron’s house done today and could start on Gary’s tomorrow. Gary walked back home, dug out another of the Cobra radios and a power supply and hauled them down to Ron’s. Man, they had gone from famine to feast in the communications department and they were going to have a primary and backup communications shack. The only problem Gary could see was that he needed a computer for his ‘communications shack’.

Preparations – Chapter 26 – The Valley

Gary still hadn't taken a nap and his headache was getting worse. He popped a couple Vicodin and sat down in his recliner to let them kick in. The next thing he knew, Derek was shaking him and it was dark outside.

"What do you want us to do tonight Dad?" Derek asked.

"Uh, crap, uh, could you get me a cup of coffee and 2 Vicodin?" Gary asked.

"Don't feel well?" Derek asked.

"Headache," Gary answered.

Gary washed the two pills down with the lukewarm coffee. He noticed that Sharon was making a new pot. He sat for a moment to let his head clear and then told Derek what he needed.

"Ok, I need you and Damon to go to the Valley tonight, Derek. There is an HRO store on Victory in Burbank. Clean it out," Gary said. "And, get your hands on some yellow pages and find us some StarDuster Base Antennas for our CB radios. While you're at it, look for some 1,000-watt linear amps for our CB's."

"Those are illegal aren't they?" Derek asked.

"I think so. In fact, I hope so," Gary tried to laugh. "Frankly, I don't care. Get as many as you can find except don't go over 1,000 watts, that's the power limit on the StarDuster antennas. While you boys are out, it wouldn't bother me a bit if you picked up some more military hardware. By the way, get a couple of those suppressors and mount them on your M16's before you go."

"Won't that be a little obvious?" Derek asked.

"No, the FA means Fast Attach. You replace the regular flashhider with Surefire's flashhider/mount." Gary replied.

"My M16 has a fixed flashhider Dad," Derek said.

"That's ok Derek, there's a bunch of GI issue M16A2's in the basement," Gary said, "Convert two of those. Another thing for your shopping list is night vision equipment. Try to take out people that have night vision equipment, ok?"

"Do you want the AN/PVS-14 Monocular Night Vision Device?" Derek asked.

"I don't know military numbers, what the hell is that?" Gary asked, none too politely.

“The AN/PVS-14 MNVD will provide leaders of combat infantry units with a lightweight night vision device. The MNVD is used in observation and command and control missions. It may be used by the soldier in several modes: hand held, head mounted, helmet mounted or affixed and boresighted to a rifle with aiming light. For longer range observation missions, a 3x magnifier is provided. The MNVD uses 3d Gen I2 technology and is capable down to overcast/starlight,” Derek said.

“You sound like a drill instructor, kid,” Gary laughed, “I just want the helmet mounted stuff, ok?”

“Ok Dad, sorry,” Derek laughed. “That’s the 14.”

“From now on, how about I tell you in English and you just translate that to military and take care of it?” Gary suggested.

“10-4,” Derek winked. “Why do you want so much comm. gear?”

“We’re starting out local, going intrastate and then interstate, ok?” Gary snapped.

“Jeez, I just asked,” Derek said.

“Sorry, kid, I’ve got a killer of a headache,” Gary explained.

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That night, the boys cleaned out the HRO in Burbank, found the StarDuster antennas and the linear amps and managed to come back with an assortment of military gear. The troops that they had run into had been pushing around some civilians that had sneaked out of the AV and had returned to the Valley. Derek had taken the M-4FA out of his pack, attached it and had demonstrated just how quiet the unit was for the benefit (?) of the troops.

The only problem was that the troops were unable to report the news to anyone; they were very, very dead. Anyway, this gave the boys a second Hummer to drive and hide; something that would prove to be of great use soon. Damon and Derek unloaded their haul from the evening, putting the M16A2’s they’d acquired, the 40mm grenades and hand grenades, etc. in the basement. The living room was beginning to fill with radio equipment, too. They just brought the Kevlar helmets, rather than removing the AN/PVS-14 equipment. They were also careful not to wake Gary.

07Mar05...

Gary slept until almost 10am and his headache wasn’t quite as bad. It was still worth 2 Vicodin, but he planned to make them last for 8 hours. By the time he’d drunk some coffee, had his nicotine fix and eaten a couple of pancakes, he felt almost human. A hot shower did wonders to clear his head and after he dressed, he went to check on the

new radio equipment. The amplifiers were XForce 40012 CB Radio Amplifiers, with variable preamp. They were for SSB and were rated at 450W dead key 1400W PEP. Gary guessed they were all the boys could find. He took an amplifier and antenna down to Ron's. Dick was up on the roof, just finishing up.

"Dick, I have the other antenna," Gary yelled to him.

"Ok, I'll come down and get it and install it," Dick called back. "Then I'll be down to work on your house."

Gary rang the bell and Linda let him in. He didn't really even have to ask anymore, he just climbed the stairs to the OP.

"What do you have there, Gar-Bear?" Ron asked.

"A linear amplifier for your CB radio partner," Gary said, "It should boost your signals some."

"Oh, oh," Ron said, "Trouble."

Gary looked out the window. A Humvee was pulled up at the entrance and from the look of the waiving arms and pointed fingers, they seemed to be interested in this house. Gary set the linear amplifier in the closet and he and Ron slowly walked to the entrance of the tract.

"Is there a problem guys?" Gary asked.

"These soldiers seem to be concerned about those antennas," Matt explained.

"What's the problem with the antennas?" Gary asked the nearest soldier.

"Why do you need so many antennas?" the soldier asked.

"Well, not that it's any of your business, the one on the far left is a CB antenna, the one next to it is a scanner antenna, the next one is a tri-bander VHF/UHF antenna and the one on the far right is a high frequency antenna," Gary said. "What's the problem?"

"You have licenses for those antennas?" the soldier asked.

"Well, unless they changed the law in the last 5 seconds, we don't need a license for the antennas," Gary said, "We only need licenses to operate the radios and yes, we have amateur technician's licenses."

It had taken several passes of his scanner for Gary to come up with what amounted to a blank license. He had one and his call sign was KD6GDQ. Ronald didn't and Gary had made one for him using the call sign W0EYO, an unused call sign. Gary had cut out

their station licenses, framed them and posted them next to the radios the day before. He had given Ron the fake wallet sized license. Ron and he pulled out their licenses to show the soldier. The soldier didn't seem to be particularly satisfied, but it was a federal license and his instructions didn't cover the situation he now found himself in.

"Well, all right, for now," the soldier said. "But I'm going to check on this with my sergeant and if you're pulling a fast one, I'll be back."

"Would you like to inspect our radio equipment?" Gary asked, "It's all perfectly legal and we have nothing to hide."

"Nah, but like I said, I'm going to check," the soldier snorted.

o

Gary and Ron began to walk back to Ron's house.

"I thought we were goners," Ron said.

"Crap, that dork wouldn't know the difference between a HF, VHF or UHF radio if his life depended on it," Gary laughed. "Besides, wasn't it you who told me that the best defense was a good offense?"

"I can't remember," Ron said.

"Look, Dick is done with your house and working on mine," Gary said, "Let's get your linear hooked up and you'll be ready to go."

Gary couldn't remember mentioning to Derek that he needed a computer for his comm. shack but there set a new computer, still in its box. It had a 19" LCD display, too. Gary hooked up the keyboard and mouse, connected the computer to his switch and plugged it into the surge protector. He went back to the living room and scrounged around in the pile until he found the speakers and took them to his desk and hooked them up. It looked ready to go, so he turned it on to see what he had. Windows XP. He entered a password at the prompt and the computer began to install all of the software on the HDD. It seemed to take forever, but finally the computer was ready to use. Gary clicked on the My Computer line in the start menu to see what he had. "Nice," he thought, "A 3.6 GHz Pentium 4 with 1 Gig of ram. He installed the software for his router/DSL setup and then clicked on Windows Update. He wondered if Microsoft were still online. Yep, they sure were and the computer needed a whole bunch of updates. He went through the process, adding first the Critical updates and Service Packs, and then the Windows XP updates and finally the driver updates. The Norton Antivirus seemed to take care of itself and was waiting for him to click next. When he was done, he played a game of FreeCell, just to initiate the computer.

Gary fiddled around until he got the computer to 'talk' to his older computer with the Win

2k on it and copied the files containing the Windows XP drivers for his three printers. By the time he had finished with all of the things he had to do, an RG-213U cable was coming down from the pipe in his ceiling. He hollered at Dick and Dick said it was the CB antenna, so he connected the antenna lead to the linear amp and had his CB ready to go. Just to be sure, he walked outside and asked Dick if the lead was connected to the antenna; he didn't want to blow the amp. Dick nodded his head yes. Gary noticed that Dick was putting his tripods in a lot faster than Ron's had gone in.

"How long do you think this will take, Dick?" he shouted.

"I'll be all done by dark," Dick shouted back.

One by one the cables came through the pipe and Gary connected them to the radios as Dick told him what the antennas were for. Dick was just about right on the money; the sun was just setting when he rang the doorbell.

"You wouldn't happen to have another one of those CB antennas would you?" Dick asked.

"Sure, do you need a radio too?" Gary asked.

"Dick smiled, "If you have one, yes."

Gary got Dick his old SSB CB radio, a linear, and a tripod, mast and cable, it was the least he could do. Well, they had communications, and from the look of it, enough equipment for several locations. Gary asked David if they could put the extra equipment in the garage and free up the living room floor. Gary hoped he wouldn't have to send the boys down to the Valley anymore, it didn't sound to him like things were very good in the Valley. And, what was this BS about the troops hassling those folks? Maybe Derek would explain when he woke up.

o

The United States of America was becoming a very bad place to live. The coup leaders were liberals, but they had a twisted way of thinking, obviously. They were, by God, going to save the people from themselves, even if they had to kill a few. They planted American made suitcase nukes in the six cities where they were least likely to do damage. The bombs planted on the pipelines and substations had only ever been intended to do superficial damage and that accounted for the utilities being restored so quickly. Unfortunately, they hadn't planned well, and the equipment they needed to rescue the people from the cities had gone up in smoke. That part of Bush's speech had been true. Bush was safely tucked away at Mt. Weather, albeit without any freedom whatsoever. They had him locked away for future use. They had killed everyone on the SS detail who wasn't a part of the plot, which was most of them. Now, they were relocating people and after a little indoctrination intended to free them.

Preparations – Chapter 27 – Blackout

What is it with tyrants? Obviously, they have their own agenda, but are they all crazy? The very idea that they could indoctrinate the American people into a new attitude was insane. Maybe the sheeple would go for it, but a lot of them died in those 6 cities. And, those that remained had been mugged by the inept running of the relocation camps. The coup was doomed to failure, but the plotters had no idea how badly they'd screwed the pooch. Gary, Ron and Clarence weren't the only people who read the Bible or figured out what Bush was getting at in his speech. Bush didn't even have the three men in mind; his message was aimed directly at the Moral Majority. They weren't called that anymore, but you know whom I mean.

As a matter of fact, none of the three men were big on church going. Getting dressed up each Sunday and sitting in a pew for an hour or so didn't make you a good Christian. Being a Christian was more about how you lived your life. It was about taking the \$25,000 the bank sent you to bail you out and using it to help other people as well as yourself. Of the three, Gar-Bear was the poorest at attending church. It just seemed to him that he ran into more hypocrites at church than anywhere else. He was probably making a blanket assumption that didn't apply to everyone in the church, but if the shoe fits, wear it. Besides, the church was the people, not the building.

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Gary had managed to get through the day without taking more Vicodin. When his headache began to creep back, he popped a couple of Tylenol extra strength and gritted his teeth. Probably most people who had experienced a head injury would have been concerned when they kept getting headaches, but Gary just attributed it to the stress of the situation. He'd checked his blood sugar and it was within the 'normal' range, so it wasn't anything to do with his diabetes. It was probably, he told himself, just the lingering effects of the blow to his head and it would pass soon. His vision was a little blurry, but what should a nearly 62 year-old diabetic expect?

Gary had a bleeder. It was a tiny vessel in his brain that had been made even smaller by the diabetic neuropathy. The fact that the vessel was severely constricted accounted, in part, for his faulty short-term memory. It had also saved his life up to this point. The boys were taking the night off and Gary ate a light dinner, took 2 Vicodin and went to bed early.

07Mar05...

Gary woke up with a splitting headache. He was really disorganized and didn't recognize his surroundings. He tried to sit up but nothing seemed to work. He looked around and it finally dawned on his muddled brain that he wasn't at home in his bed. It looked like a hospital, but he hadn't gone to the hospital so what the hell was he doing in one?

Sharon hadn't been able to awaken Gary. She became concerned and they called the Paramedics. They couldn't bring Gary around and transported him to Lancaster to the hospital.

An MRI revealed the bleeder and Gary had gone under the knife. Three hours later, he was in the recovery room but didn't wake up for another two. And, when he did wake up, he was a pretty confused tired old man. The doctor came by and explained what had happened. Gary was only hearing about every third word and they weren't registering. The next thing he remembered was waking up a second time in a bed in a private room.

Man was he thirsty. His mouth was so dry that he could hardly talk. He croaked out "water" and the nurse pressed a wet washcloth to his lips. Once he got his voice, he asked what had happened. The nurse said something about a microscopic aneurysm and how lucky he had been. The doctor had explained it all to him, didn't he remember? What doctor? Oh, that guy when he woke up the first time that was from India or somewhere who spoke perfect Indian English. He talked and Gary had listened, anyway. It was anybody's guess what the guy had been trying to say, but it must have been important or the guy wouldn't have said it, right?

Gary looked around and decided that this was Lancaster Community hospital, not AV Hospital. That was good; AV had a bad reputation, even though it was the AV's trauma center. "Oh, oh he comes Doctor Mumbles," Gary thought.

"Mr. Olsen, how are we feeling tonight?" Mumbles asked.

"I don't know how you feel Doc, but I feel like crap," Gary said.

"I'll increase your medication," Mumbles said.

"What happened?" Gary asked.

"Were you recently injured?" Mumbles asked, "Perhaps a blow to the head?"

"Yeah, but it didn't hurt anything vital," Gary tried to joke.

"What happened?" Mumbles asked.

"We were in a firefight and a bullet hit a rock and I got beamed by the rock," Gary explained.

"And the headaches?" Mumbles asked.

"Came and went, until recently," Gary said.

"We repaired a broken blood vessel in your head," Mumbles explained. "If you weren't a

diabetic with neuropathy, you'd be dead."

"Some people have all the luck," Gary said. "When can I go home?"

"Normally, we'd keep you for several days, perhaps a week," Mumbles said, "But, due to the present crisis, we're sending you home tomorrow. You will need to get plenty of bed rest."

(Yeah, right!) "Ok Doc, I'll see to it, what is your name, by the way?" Gary asked.

"I'm Doctor Singh," Mumbles said.

"Thanks for fixing me up Doc," Gary said, "How about that pain pill?"

"The nurse will be in a moment Mr. Olsen and we'll dispense some Vicodin for you to take home," Dr. Singh said.

"*What a revolting development this was,*" to quote Reilly (if you understand that, you're old).

08Mar05...

Gary woke up to see Clarence and Sharon standing by his bed. He suddenly realized that he didn't have any drawers on either. What was the deal with hospitals, they always took your drawers when you went into surgery, but never seem to give them back. Maybe they had an outlet store for used drawers, do you suppose? Anyway Sharon had been through this before and, bless her heart was holding a pair of clean drawers for Gary.

He took them and Sharon pulled the curtain shut so he could feel a little more 'comfortable'. Then, she handed him his pants. Buttheads would probably charge him for breakfast and it was only, he looked, 6:30am? Darn, he was a sick man, what was this crap about throwing him out at 6:30am? Sorry Gary, new Medicare rules, as soon as the bleeding stopped, you were well enough to go home.

Clarence took one arm and Sharon the other and walked him to the car. Where was the wheelchair they insisted you ride even though you could walk? Oh, he couldn't walk worth a crap, so that probably meant he didn't get a wheelchair. They helped him into the front seat and woke him when they got to Moon Shadows.

"Thanks partner," Gary told Clarence.

"You go to bed, Gary," Clarence said, "We've got it covered."

"Got what covered?" Gary asked.

“Go to bed Gary, you’re a sick man,” Clarence said.

“Not according to old Doc Mumbles,” Gary said, “Hey did they give you any Vicodin?”

“Yes dear,” Sharon said, “A whole 12 tablets of 500-mg Vicodin.”

“That’s great,” Gary said, “But what do I do for medicine this afternoon?”

It didn’t matter; Gary went to sleep and didn’t wake up until after dark. His head didn’t hurt nearly as badly either. He got out of bed and went to the bathroom. Then, he put on his jeans and shirt and sandals and got his cane. Ron was sick and he had to go check on him. Apparently no one heard the garage door open and Gary made it to Ron’s without being discovered. He rang the bell and Linda looked at him like he was crazy.

“What are you doing out of bed?” she asked.

“I came to check on Ronald,” Gary said.

“Ron’s fine, you should go home and get back in bed,” Linda said.

“I’ll be the judge of that,” Gary mumbled and started up the stairs. “Funny,” he thought, “I didn’t remember there being this many steps.”

Gary finally made it to the top of the stairs and walked (stumbled) into the OP.

“How are you doing Ronald?” Gary asked.

“Aw crap,” Ron said. “Take this chair before you fall on your butt, I can’t pick you up with only one arm.”

Gary sat down in the chair (collapsed). “So tell me, what’s the other guy look like?” Gary said.

“What other guy?” Ron asked.

“The one that kicked my butt,” Gary said.

“You’re a sick man Gar-Bear,” Ron said, “You darn near died.”

“Well I didn’t die and I’m actually feeling a little better tonight, Ron,” Gary said, “So bring me up to speed and I’ll go home and go back to bed.”

“The feds found that Hummer that Damon had hidden in the garage down the street,” Ron explained. “They came over here asking what we knew about it and Dick told them some guy in a uniform dumped it and headed down Avenue R to the east.”

"They buy that?" Gary asked.

"I guess," Ron said, "We never heard any more about it."

"Where did Damon stash the other Hummer?" Gary asked.

"He didn't say and I didn't ask," Ron replied.

"I guess you and I have about the same kind of luck, Ron," Gary said, "You got cancer and it saved your life and I got diabetes and it saved my life. I'm going home now, but I'll be back in the morning."

"Thanks for the warning," Ron smiled.

Gary had only given the boys one night off, so he wondered if they had been out 'buying' military equipment or had gotten foolish and taken the night off just because he'd gotten a little sick. He barely cleared Ron's door before one was at each elbow trying to help him get back home.

"Thanks guys," he said, "But I got here under my own steam and I have enough left to get home. Did you go out last night or sit around and mope?"

"Actually, we found where the Guard was keeping their supplies, Dad," Derek said, "We made out like bandits."

"I don't suppose you've managed to recruit anyone yet have you?" Gary asked.

"Yes and no," Derek said, "Last night while we were checking out the Armory over on 30th Street, we overheard a couple of locals talking about what a bunch of BS this whole thing is, but we didn't try to approach them. We're going to check them out a little first."

"Good, Ron told me to be careful we didn't get duped into taking in a plant," Gary said.

"What did you get last night?" Gary asked.

"Claymores, 40mm grenades, magazines and some AN/PVS-14 equipment," Damon answered.

"Good. Try and come up with some of those Interceptor vests, would you?" Gary suggested, "I don't like you two yard birds running around without any protection."

"I used your radio to talk to some friends back in Iowa yesterday," Derek said. "I was right about who is behind all of this."

Gary leaned over and whispered a name into Derek's ear.

“How did you know?” Derek asked.

“I didn’t, but he seemed like the most obvious one to be able to pull it off,” Gary said. “It’s a pretty sad day when someone like that would sponsor a coup against the government. You realize that this will just make it all that much harder to get control of the country back don’t you?”

“I don’t know about that Dad.” Derek said, “All he is going to succeed in doing is making a whole lot of people mad.”

Preparations – Chapter 28 – Recruits

The summer soldier and the sunshine patriot will, in this crisis, shrink from the service of his country; but he that stands it NOW deserves the love and thanks of man and woman. - Thomas Paine

Damon and Derek were not of that ilk. Derek was a year-around soldier and he was very angry. The idea that a man of that stature would attempt to do what was now being done chilled him to the core. For all that was said about America, the good and the bad, when the people were pushed far enough, they would rise to the occasion. That was true in the past and it was true now. America had gotten soft from too many years of good living. Then decay had set in and people like the late Senator Kennedy and the like set about destroying the country from within.

There wasn't any free lunch, anymore, and hadn't been for a long time. But, if one were to believe the liberals, some of us had to buy the rest the free lunch. When it had started was debatable, but where it started was a fact known by most Americans, right here in good old California. Or, did they know that? They did if they watched some of the educational channels like Discovery and the History Channel.

Damon wasn't really certain what there was about the situation that po'd him. Maybe it was the fact that this temporary government thought they had the right to tell people what to think. That was why Damon hadn't done very well in the Navy; they had told him what to think and he couldn't deal with that. It had nothing to do with whether or not he was patriotic; it was just some sort of rebellion within him against authority figures. It had taken his Dad a long time to figure that one out because his Dad had his own internal struggle with authority figures and sometimes, people couldn't see the forest for the trees.

There were going back tonight to see if the same 2 men were pulling guard duty at the Armory. If they were and if they still sounded disgruntled (as opposed to grunted) they might just approach the men and engage them in a little conversation. Normally, they would have preferred family men, but this fight could turn deadly very quickly and Derek and he agreed to only recruit single men. And, nothing against the fairer sex, but they were going to pass on the ladies for this group. There wasn't any doubt about their abilities, far from it, but Mary had suggested that they form a separate group with the ladies that wanted in and the ladies would do their own thing. Somehow, Damon had the idea that the people they were up against would be better off getting hit by the men than that group of women Mary was forming. Maybe he was thinking about the Indians and the things that those women had done to captives a hundred or more years before.

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They left around 10 pm and made their way to the armory. It was a 2-mile walk, but they made good time. The same two men were sitting there and Derek heard one of them say: "I've had enough of this BS, I'm out of here."

His companion said, "Me too, it just isn't right what they are telling us to do. Those people did nothing to deserve our attention. Let alone get arrested."

"Where do you two think you're going?" Derek suddenly said, walking up to the men.

"Screw you Sarge, I ain't putting up with this crap anymore," the first man said.

The second man started to raise his M16, he was clearly ready to fight.

"I wouldn't do that if I were you," Damon called from the shadows. Damon walked out, his M16 still on his shoulder, but that nasty little shotgun was pointed right at the second man's gut.

"So you boys have had enough, huh?" Derek challenged. "Are you just going to run and hide or, are you intending to do something about it?"

The first soldier looked at Derek for a moment. "I don't know you, who the hell are you and what do you mean by 'do something about it'?"

"It's simple," Derek said, "Are you a real soldier sworn to protect and defend the Constitution or are you a sunshine patriot? No, you don't know me, but if you really want to do something to turn this country around and restore freedom, you'll come with us."

"And if we don't want to come with you?" the second soldier asked.

"Well, we've revealed ourselves to you," Damon said, "So, you could turn us in if you got in a tough spot. We're not going to risk that, guy."

"How do I know you aren't part of this whole conspiracy and are just trying to trick us?" the first soldier ask.

"You don't, do you?" Derek said, "On the other hand, what do you have to lose? If we're the bad guys, you're dead. If we're the good guys and you say no, you're dead. Roll those dice."

"What do you think Jim?" the first soldier asked the second.

"Roy, if I'm going to die, it will be fighting, not because I chickened out," Jim said.

"Are you both single?" Derek asked.

"What business is that of yours?" Roy asked.

"We don't want any married men," Derek explained. "The authorities could get to their families and really put us in a bind."

"I'm divorced," Roy said, "And Jim's never been married."

"What about the ex-wife?" Derek asked.

"What about her?" Roy asked, "The broad ran off with my best friend and got herself killed in LA."

"How's about you two help us with some supplies, if you're in?" Derek said.

"You asking or telling?" Jim challenged.

"Asking," Derek replied, "You're in if you want in, otherwise..."

"There's a deuce and a half parked out back," Roy said, "If one of you boys wants to get it, I'll help; I'm in."

"I'm in too, if the offer is still open," Jim added.

"Well Jim, my name is Derek and we'd be glad to have you and Roy," Derek extended his hand, "The guy with the shotgun is my older brother Damon."

"Why doesn't one of you go get that truck?" Damon suggested.

The Armory didn't have that much in it. Some more night vision gear, magazines, 6 M-16's, none with M203's, several cases of MRE's, and a battalion sized first aid kit about covered it. They loaded the meager pickings into the truck and headed to the place they'd raided the night before. There was a hell of a lot more stuff there than in the Armory. They bluffed their way into additional claymores, 40mm grenades, and magazines plus several of the Interceptor vests with level IV 10"x12"plates. It turned out to be a pretty good night.

"We're going to take you two to a place about 2 miles from where we're staying," Derek said. "Do you know where Grecian Isles is?"

"Out a ways on Ave. R?" Jim asked.

"Yes. We'll put you up there for tonight and leave you a case of the Meals Refused by Ethiopians," Derek commented.

"You really a Staff?" Roy asked.

"Yep. Iowa National Guard," Derek answered.

"Iowa? What the hell are you doing in California?" Roy quizzed.

“Saving the country, what do you think?” Damon answered for Derek.

They took Roy and Jim to an empty trailer and got a case of MRE’s out of the truck. Derek explained that he would ‘drive back’ the next day and would bring them some real food. This was a 2-bedroom trailer and it had clean sheets, running water and everything they needed, except food. They would cover the details more fully tomorrow. And if anyone came around looking for them, those folks over in the Moon Shadows tract to the east would maybe give them shelter; Derek wasn’t certain, he said, but he’d heard good things about them.

Rather than risk exposing their ruse, Derek and Damon drove the 6-by down to Avenue R-8, east to 47th street, north to Avenue R and approached Moon Shadows from the east. They drove to the house and unloaded the haul into Gary’s garage. Damon said he’d take the truck back to the Armory and would be back in under an hour. It never hurt to be a little extra careful.

◦

09Mar05...

It was about 2am when Gary heard the boys pull up. It must be the 9th because it was after midnight. Gary went to the kitchen and made a pot of coffee, and then went to the garage.

“I put a pot of coffee on,” he said, “How did you to do tonight?”

“Pour me a cup and I’ll tell you,” Derek said. “I’ll wait in the office.”

Gary got 2 cups of coffee and returned to the office. He was feeling a lot better with the extra sleep and the thing that hurt the worst was the incision.

“So talk,” Gary said.

“I love you too Dad,” Derek laughed. “How are you feeling?”

“Better, thanks,” Gary said, “The incision hurts, but I’ll be ok.”

“No headache?” Derek asked.

“Not for the first time in a long while, no,” Gary said.

“We picked up a little stuff at the Armory, there wasn’t much there,” Derek started. “And we have our first 2 recruits. We have them in a trailer at Grecian Isles. Tried to make them think we don’t live anywhere around. Names are Roy and Jim. My gut tells me that they’re ok. We borrowed a 6-by and drove out to the place we raided last night. We got more claymores, 40mm grenades and some of that body armor.”

“With plates?” Gary asked. When Derek was in Kosovo, Gary offered to buy him level 4 plates for his Interceptor, but Derek had refused saying that the Army wouldn’t let him use them.

“Level 4,” Derek said.

“Really? I thought the National Guard would only have level 3, if any,” Gary said.

“Me, too, but I sure wasn’t going to pass them up,” Derek agreed.

“Overall, how are we doing?” Gary asked.

“Well, the basement is going to be pretty full with this load Dad,” Derek replied, “I think we can hold off for a while until we get more people and issue some of the equipment.”

“Do we have many hand grenades?” Gary asked.

“A couple of dozen, why?” Derek answered.

“I’d like maybe 4 apiece for myself, Ron and Clarence,” Gary said. “Sure wish I could figure out a way to put M203’s on those M1A’s.”

“No can do Dad, But I could get Damon to look around for some of those Vietnam era M-79 grenade launchers,” Derek replied.

“Does that use the same 40mm grenade as the M203?” Gary asked, interested.

“Yep. The grenades for the Mk 19 are different,” Derek said.

“Well, crap, we’ll never find any of those grenades,” Gary said.

“Dad, if Damon can find the M-79’s he can find grenades,” Derek assured his father.

“How much one of those things weigh, we’re old men boy,” Gary asked.

“Six pounds and the rounds weigh ½ pound,” Derek explained.

“If we get some,” Gary said, “We’ll put one in the OP and three up by the gate, we can barely make it with all the magazines.”

“Sounds like a plan to me,” Derek acknowledged.

Preparations – Chapter 29 – Thumpers

“Did you get my son out of California?” the man in charge asked.

“He is on a plane right now,” one of his subordinates replied.

“I would have just left him there if it weren’t for the wife,” the first speaker announced. “Where the hell did he get off saying, ‘I wish it were about health care, the coming water crisis, the need for alternative energy or the economy but it won’t be’?”

“You know how kids are, they sometimes say things that aren’t in our best interest,” the subordinate observed.

“Well, he got to sit in the hell hole for a while, so I hope he learned his lesson,” the leader said.

◦

When Damon got back to the tract from dropping off the truck, Derek mentioned the M-79 Thumpers. Why did we want those, Damon wanted to know. Well, Derek suggested probably because he couldn’t throw a baseball grenade far enough to escape the blast radius. Damon pointed out that the effective casualty-producing radius was only 15 meters. Derek said he knew that but he didn’t think Gary could throw anything 50’ unless it was a load of BS. Damon said he’d look, but he didn’t know if he’d be able to find the Thumpers.

Gary overheard the conversation and as much as he hated to admit it, Derek was right and that was why he wanted to put an M203 on his M1A. But, if Damon could find some of the M-79’s that would fit the bill really well. As it was, he figured he was going to remove 2 of the magazine pouches from his web gear. He’d just have to trust God that if he got into another firefight, 180 rounds would be enough. But no one had bothered the tract since 25Feb05 and that was two weeks, well actually 12 days, ago. Maybe their luck was improving. Or, maybe those troops had just rounded everybody up and locked them in a cage somewhere. Gary didn’t even realize that 5 miles over his head, the son of the butthead behind this whole mess was in a 737 headed to Mt. Weather.

Now, Derek hadn’t given him much to go on so far as these 2 new recruits were concerned. Apparently Derek was going to get up early and go over to see them, so maybe he could tag along. The last time Sharon had gone to Stater brothers, they issued her a ration book. And they weren’t just rationing a few scarce items. Nope, they were rationing everything, even his beloved tp. They were allowing 1 pound of meat per family per week.

SOBs behind this were probably sitting down to New York strips and Lobster, with a shrimp cocktail as an appetizer and some chocolate mousse for dessert. This little resistance movement they were starting here in California didn’t amount to much yet, but

give them a few weeks and they'd be fully staffed and equipped. Then those soldiers who were sticking with the guard were going to start dropping like flies. What they really needed, he reflected was some long range sniping equipment like the Barrett M82 .50BMG rifles with their fancy scopes or McMillan Tac-50s. He'd have to remember to suggest that to Damon.

Speaking of Damon, he was really into this saving the country business. Of, maybe he just liked stealing. Either way, it was for a good cause. And, what's her name had really ripped them off on the guns and ammo. He didn't mind paying a fair price, but Walmart had been charging \$64.30 for 1,000 rounds of 5.56x45 ammo and she had asked for \$250 for the same 1,000 rounds. He guessed it was the law of supply and demand; at least she was selling ammo.

Speaking of Walmart, it really po'd him that a minor screw up at the store at 47th and S had ended up with Walmart not selling guns at any of its California stores. They had pretty reasonable prices back when they were selling guns. Maybe Ron was right. Maybe after this was all over, he would sell the house for what he could get and move up to the state of Nevada where Fleataxi lived. Fleataxi seemed like a nice guy. There were several downsides to moving to Nevada, too, but they seemed to have pretty open guns laws before TSHTF. No doubt this liberal bunch that had taken over the country intended to disarm the entire population.

Gary went to the living room, sat down in his recliner and put his feet up. Sometimes that mattress gave him a backache and this was one of those times. He dozed off; happy with the way his boys were working together. They had always pulled together, ever since he'd been forced to relinquish custody of them after he married Sharon. His brother hadn't liked Sharon and was an attorney; however, that was a long story that didn't bear repeating. And people always wondered what Gary had against his late brother. What goes around comes around and the good Lord had seen fit to take his brother at the age of 48.

Gary awoke with a start just after 8 am. He poured another cup of coffee and nuked it to get it hot. He made his way to the office, got a cigarette and walked into the garage to look at last night's haul, which the boys hadn't put away. "They shouldn't leave this stuff sitting around," he thought. He counted the MRE's and discovered there were 30 cases; all with 2004 manufacture dates on the boxes. Those could stay in the garage with his other MRE's. The 15 vests were all the same size, large. He walked over to David and Lorrie's and got David and two of the boys to come move the stuff to the basement. Sharon had made a fresh pot of coffee, so he filled his mug and headed to Ron's. Ron had been back to the hospital the other day and had the staples pulled. Gary didn't know why Ron bothered making the trip; he had a pair of pliers.

"Morning partner, how are you doing?" Ron greeted him when he entered the op.

"I feel good Ron, even the incision quit hurting," Gary reported.

“Heard the boys pull in with a big truck last night, did they make a killing?” Ron asked.

“Not so much by volume, but we have some vests now and can outfit one squad with everything,” Gary told him. “I was talking to Derek about putting M203’s on the M1A rifles, but he says it can’t be done. Damon is going to look for some of those Vietnam War M79 Thumpers.”

“They use the same grenades, right?” Ron said.

“You would think that the M79, M203 and the Mk-19 would all use the same grenade, but the Mk 19 uses something different,” Gary said. “That’s your government at work. And when they do standardize on something, they always get it wrong. They should have adopted the FAL rifle, according to Derek, and kept the M1911.”

“Why do you want a grenade launcher?” Ron asked.

“Well, sometimes a grenade works a lot better than a rifle bullet and I don’t think I could throw a grenade far enough that I wouldn’t be in the blast radius,” Gary explained.

“You’re not planning on being part of this squad they’re forming are you?” Ron quizzed.

“I may be old, but I’m not stupid, pal; hell no,” Gary said, “On the other hand we may have to defend the tract again.”

“To be honest, I sort of regret giving that Super Match to you,” Ron ventured, “I don’t regret you’re having it, but I could do a lot of shooting right here from my table.”

Gary sort of figured Ron might feel that way when he got to feel better. He’d mentioned to Derek that if Ron wanted the rifle back, he was going to return it and Derek could use his loaded standard model. Derek had said he understood perfectly, there was something about a man and his love for his guns. Damon had come up with a bunch of Harris bipods and Derek had installed them on the M1A’s and Clarence’s FAL. Gary was going to keep the 10-round mags for the loaded standard Derek would now be using, but Ron was going to get his rifle back. *Improvise. Adapt. Overcome.* That movie was on Gary’s top 10 list, that was for sure.

“I’ve got to run home for a minute Ronald McDonald, I’ll be right back,” Gary announced.

Gary went back to the house, dug out the Super Match and the web gear that went with it. Ron wasn’t going to need the web gear and they were a trifle short of the stuff, so Gary loaded the magazines into a box and hauled the rifle and box back to Ron’s.

“I wasn’t being an Indian giver,” Ron said when he saw his Super Match.

“Well, I didn’t think you were partner,” Gary replied. “I kept the web gear and just

brought the rifle and mags. You can get John to move your 7.62x51 ammo up here.”

“Already did Gar-Bear,” Ron laughed, “It’s in the closet. Hmm, added a bipod, huh?”

“Yeah, another one of Damon’s little recovery bits,” Gary said. “I need another suppressor, though. I’m going to send Damon to Lancaster tonight, I think I may know where we can find one.”

“You can take the can off the Super Match,” Ron suggested.

“No way chief,” Gary said, “It’s perfect the way it is. You can sit here in this window and snipe like a champion and they won’t know where to look.”

“And I can rest the bipod on the window ledge,” Ron replied, “Neat.”

“How much longer are you going to be in that sling?” Gary asked.

“I thought 2 weeks,” Ron said, “But when I went to get the stitches out, they said 6 more weeks. It’s awkward as hell only having one wing. When do you get your stitches out?”

“I’m just going to bring you my pair of pliers and let you pull them, Ron” Gary said. “Figure on the 17th of March.

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10Mar05...

Yesterday had been uneventful and they had gone out last night scrounging. The way to get Damon to excel at a task was to suggest that he couldn’t accomplish it; that it was just beyond his abilities. Damon had brought Gary another Surefire suppressor for his standard M1A and 6, not 4, M79’s. Where in the hell? Anyway, there were enough grenades to fight a war. He had M386HE rounds, M397A1 airburst rounds and M576 buckshot rounds. And, this crap about the rounds not being interchangeable between the M203 and the M79 was just that, a bunch of crap. Damon also had some M433HEDP rounds for the M-79.

Gary mounted the suppressor on the standard M1A; he was becoming pretty adept at changing those adapters/flashhiders. When he had his chore done, Gary hauled the M79 down to Ron’s.

“Where did he find those?” Ron asked.

“Hell, I don’t know and I know better than to ask, partner,” Gary said, “David’s boys are bringing you grenades in a few minutes. We’re just going to give you the High Explosive Dual Purpose rounds and the airburst rounds. You won’t need any of the buckshot.”

“The hell you say,” Ron remarked, “Bring me some of everything.”

“Ok, when they get here, I’ll send them back for some of the buckshot rounds,” Gary relented.

“That’s better Gar-Bear,” Ron said. “I can’t believe that it’s only been 3 days since they hauled your butt out of here in an ambulance.”

“It was probably easy surgery Ron,” Gary remarked, “When they cut into my head, there probably wasn’t any brain matter in the way.”

“Morning guys,” Clarence said entering the op. “Gary you’re looking good. How are you feeling?”

“Headache is gone and the stitches quit hurting,” Gary said, “I’ll get by. Stop by the house when you go home pal, I’ve got a grenade launcher and some rounds for you.”

“Is that Ron’s Super Match?” Clarence asked, “I thought he gave it to you.”

“He’s nothing but an Indian giver Clarence,” Gary winked, “He was all over me this morning about getting it back now that he’s feeling better.”

“Really?” Clarence asked.

“Don’t believe a word he says Clarence,” Ron boomed.

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“You are a real disappointment Junior,” the leader was berating his son. “I’ve busted my hump for 30 years in the Army and just when I have a chance at making something of myself, you go and run your mouth off and ruin my chances.”

“Yes sir,” the son replied.

“Anyway, I got what I wanted, but in a roundabout way,” the man continued. “Did you enjoy being in that relocation camp in the Antelope Valley?”

“No sir,” the son replied.

“What do you have to say for yourself?” the man asked.

“You’re wrong Dad,” the boy bristled, “There is already some resistance springing up in the Antelope Valley. A lot of the National Guard troops are just disappearing. I heard them belly aching that someone was stealing military equipment, too. I’d bet it’s the same all over the country. You can’t ‘reeducate’ the American people any more than you can make me think the way you want me to think. You’re just a petty tyrant.”

The man would have had his son taken out and shot right then and there, but his wife would have raised hell and it just wasn't worth it. He'd have the boy put on a janitorial detail to help keep Mt. Weather clean. He wasn't a petty tyrant, no sir. There wasn't anything petty about him. By God, if it came to it, he'd jump in an Abrams and lead the charge himself. He had some background in armor after all.

Preparations – Chapter 30 – The New Guys

Roy and Jim were wondering what they'd gotten themselves into. Damon and Derek seemed to be on the up and up and they sure had an axe to grind with the government, or so it seemed. "Well," Roy thought, "So do Jim and I. This was pure, unadulterated BS."

A knock at the door made them bolt for their rifles.

"Who is it?" Jim called out.

"It's Derek," was the response.

"Come in," Roy said lowering his rifle slightly.

"Did you guys get a good night's sleep?" Derek asked.

"I don't know about Jim," Roy smiled, "But I did."

"Yeah, me, too," Jim replied.

"Any second thoughts?" Derek asked.

"As a matter of fact, yes," Roy said.

"And?" Derek asked.

"We're doing the right thing," Roy said.

"Well, get your things and let's go," Derek said.

"Go where?" Jim asked.

"Why to headquarters," Derek said, "Where else."

"I didn't hear a vehicle," Roy said.

"We'll walk," Derek replied.

"Two miles?" Roy protested. "They must be out looking for us by now."

"Not exactly," Derek replied, "Don't forget the MRE's."

Derek led Roy and Jim to Moon Shadows. They knew about this place. About 2 weeks back, there had been one hell of a firefight right here at the entrance. The Paramedics

had hauled a couple of the people to Lancaster to the hospital, but no one had been killed on this side of the engagement.

Jim and Roy had been part of the troops that had been called out. They hadn't taken part in any of the killing of the wounded; the people were just hungry and looking for food. If it had been up to them, Jim and he would have shot some of their fellow Guardsmen; some of those men were just plain cruel. They went to a house at the end of the street and upstairs. There were three old men sitting there, one with his left arm in a sling, a second with a bandage on his head and a third, a tall thin black man with a grin permanently etched on his face.

"Roy, Jim," Derek said, "I'd like you to meet my father, he's the guy with the bandage on his head, Ron, the guy with the sling and Clarence. They're sort of in charge of this whole thing."

"Oh crap," Roy thought, "We're being led by a bunch of has been cripples."

Ron was the people expert. He saw the doubt flash on Roy's face when Derek introduced them.

"So, Roy," Ron said, "I'll bet you're thinking something like, oh crap, we're being led by a bunch of has been cripples, am I right?"

"How did you...?" Roy started to say.

"Well, you're right, we're pretty crippled up," Ron continued, "But we're far from has been. I'd prefer to think of it as our being experienced cripples."

"Morning guys," Clarence said, "I'm Clarence and it's purely nice to meet you."

"Take a seat boys," Gary said, "And we'll bring you up to speed on our plans."

Gary proceeded to outline his idea. They were going to build a strike force of from 40 to 60 individuals. There would be a second strike force made up solely of the female recruits. Derek was going to lead the main strike force and his wife, Mary who was also an Army veteran, would lead the women. They had some equipment hidden away, but needed more. More than that, they needed bodies; a lot of them and in short order. Once they had the team built up, they were going to start major harassment operations, but for now, they were just recruiting and building up their supplies.

"They're watching this housing tract very closely," Roy announced.

"We know," Ron said, "But we're not going to run the operations out of this tract. We're going to use Grecian Isles. The HQ will be here, but the strike teams will be there."

"If you're looking for supplies," Jim said, "You can get all you want in Lancaster. They

turned that big parking lot at the Sheriff's Department at Lancaster Boulevard and Sierra Highway into a depot. After seeing how Damon and Derek bluffed those supplies and vests off that bunch the other night, they shouldn't have any trouble getting whatever you need."

"What about people?" Ron asked.

"I know almost 20 people ready to bolt," Roy said, "If they haven't already."

"I know some that Roy doesn't," Jim added.

"You understand our rules, right boys?" Gary asked. "Single people only, with no ties."

"But women are ok, right?" Roy asked.

"As long as they have no attachments, yes," Gary answered.

"If you want, Derek, we can get that deuce and a half tonight and make a run to the depot in Lancaster," Jim suggested. "Roy and I can change into some civvies and make the rounds during the daytime and try and recruit people that qualify."

"Fair enough, but you take them to the trailer park," Derek said, "And don't say a single word about the housing tract. Damon and I will have a talk with these recruits and if they pass muster, they're in. If they don't, they're dead. Just be careful whom you invite in. If there are too many ringers, it will reflect badly on your judgment."

"If you think any of them are ringers," Roy said, "Tell me and I'll shoot them myself."

"The two of you get back to the trailer park and start recruiting," Derek said. "We'll come by each day and check on the new people. And, don't think I don't appreciate the offer Roy, but Damon needs to keep in practice with that shotgun of his, so we'll take care of any ringers."

That was an insurance policy of sorts. If Roy or Jim were a ringer, they could fake killing other ringers that they brought in. You just couldn't be too careful. The boys would go to Lancaster tonight and get more supplies. Even though the basement was full, there were a lot of empty trailers at Grecian Isle where they could store the plunder. In fact, maybe they ought to move some of the stuff out of the basement and use it just for a gunroom.

They would just establish themselves as the supply sergeants of a Guard unit that was coming into the area and with a set of fake orders generated on Gary's computer, get the US government to inadvertently sponsor the revolt that was brewing. According to the Ham radio, there were small groups like theirs all over the US. Maybe in time they could hook up with the other groups and become more effective, but for now, they would go it alone.

Jim and Roy left to go back to the trailer. There were all kinds of clothes in the closets, they'd noticed, so it wouldn't be hard to find something to fit. They had to give credit to these Olsen boys; they were pretty well organized for a couple of farmers from the Midwest. Jim occasionally listened to KTPI and a lyric came to mind, something by Hank Williams, Jr. what was it called? Oh yeah, *A Country Boy Can Survive*. Well whether they were farmers or not, those two country boys had it together. And those three old guys seemed to have their crap together, too. That Clarence was pretty quiet and that grin was all but painted on his face. He seemed to be so happy. What the hell was there to be happy about? Well guys, Damon hadn't shot you with that nasty little shotgun of his, had he? You should be happy, too.

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Wesley Clark had to admit that he'd overestimated his capacity and underestimated the resilience of the American public. The plan had gone off without a hitch and everything was moving along well until they'd run into logistics problems and hadn't been able to supply the refugees from the nuked cities with hot food and warm accommodations. Then, the dissatisfaction had set in.

They forced Bush to record a speech, but they must have missed something in that speech; rather than calm down the population, it seemed to inflame them. Junior was right about one thing, there was trouble brewing in that suburb of Los Angeles, what was it called; oh yes, Palmdale. He was just going to have to send in some regular Army people, these National Guard types weren't cutting the mustard.

That was one thing his fellow liberal Clinton had gotten wrong; he'd cut the military far too small and then that butthead Bush had gotten the US mixed up in Afghanistan and Iraq. The troops were on the way home now, the war in Iraq had been cancelled on account of lack of interest, his interest, and the UN was doing fine in Kosovo without the US's help.

Clark didn't realize that he was cutting his own throat bringing those troops home. These were men and women of the American armed forces fighting for freedom in far off lands. Bringing them home would just fuel the fires of discontent that were starting to burn in America. He guessed he'd kept himself in the shadows for long enough, it was time to put in an appearance and reassure the public that the government was in safe hands. In 1981 President Reagan was injured after a failed assassination attempt and Alexander Haig famously blundered on TV, claiming constitutional authority ("I am in control here"), when, in fact, the order of succession places the secretary of state below the vice president, the speaker of the House and the president pro tempore of the Senate. Haig, it should be remembered was also a former NATO Commander just like Clark. Maybe it was something that rubbed off on people who were placed in charge of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. It was a shame Haig was a Republican; he'd fit right in with this bunch of zealots who were trying to save America from itself.

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It should be remembered that in its heyday, before the population glut, the Antelope Valley was a haven for the so-called militia groups. They hadn't gone away, they'd gone underground. She had kept them well supplied operating a storefront business and a business out of her home. You might be surprised what you would find if you started looking under beds and in closets there in the AV, especially in Lancaster. She would have bought Gary's Mini-14, tricked out as it was, if it weren't for the fact that there were so many people in the store that day. And, she'd have paid a fair price instead of the \$250 she'd quoted the guy. Her husband and she had actually made it out of California and all the way to Denver. It was like going out of the frying pan and into the fire. Denver had been spared the bomb, but not the onslaught of federalized National Guard troops. You lived and learned.

Damon and Derek pulled in to the supply depot in Lancaster shortly after dark, driving the 6-by. Derek had spent a lot of time on Gary's computer that day and used the floppy disk of forms to generate a ton of orders. He ran off blank requisition forms and filled them in with a ballpoint. Damon faked the signatures. They didn't have any trouble at all getting established and came away with many prizes. Gary had cornered the boys and told them to get an M82 or whatever was available. Well, they had the 2 McMillan TAC-50s (US designation Mk 15), a lot of the Interceptor vests, M16A2's, ammo, magazines, grenades, 40mm grenades and enough M203's for every rifle and then some. They had even managed a couple of M40s, an afterthought. In addition, they had ACUs, boots, field jackets, helmets and night vision equipment including scopes, binoculars and the 14's. Derek had made it a point to get lots of radios, too. Old Ron was going to need help to handle all of the different radios he had. They would probably just put a couple bunks in the OP and Clarence, Ron and Gary would end up manning the OP 24/7. The sniper ammo was Hornady A-MAX 750gr Match, Mk211MP, M118LR, Mk 262, .300 Winchester magnum and .338 Lapua, just in case.

Jim and Roy had a pretty good day themselves. There were 17 candidates safely tucked away at Grecian Isles waiting for screening by Damon and Derek. They had inadvertently brought in one ringer, but that was ok, Damon and Derek would find the individual and dispose of her. Derek didn't expect perfection out of Roy and Jim. Hell, up to 10% ringers was to be expected as far as Derek was concerned. The problem was that you sometimes got too close to people and didn't really know them. That's why there was all of the secrecy and the isolation. The candidates were just average men and women; most with their heads screwed on straight, but some whom for whatever reason, were misguided. Still, the security of the operation required that they be eliminated. It was like Derek had told Roy and Jim, once you knew anything about the operation, you knew too much unless you were a part of it.

Training was going to be strictly OJT. These people had already been through boot camp and knew how a fighting unit was supposed to work. There were going to start operations as soon as they had two squads put together. Then, as additional people

came aboard, the new folks would be integrated into the existing squads and some of the experienced people used to run the newly formed groups. The Army had done it that way for a long time and you either 'earned your wings' or died. They'd find someplace safe to use as a firing range, maybe out by Devil's Punchbowl in the mountains to the south and east. They weren't the Delta Force, but give them a little time and they'd take them on too.

Preparations – Chapter 31 – The OP

11Mar05...

“Would you look at all the radios,” Ron complained to Clarence and Gary, “I only have one arm I can use here, you know.”

“Derek said something about moving in a bunk bed and the three of us just living right here in this room,” Gary commented.

“That ought to be a formula for success,” Ron said, the sarcasm dripping from his voice.

“Oh I don’t know Ron, it might be ok,” Clarence said, “All we have to do is use the same brand of deodorant. I was thinking maybe Strawberry.”

“Huh?” Ron said.

“Ron, it’s a BPT,” Gary laughed. “Ok Clarence, we’ll use Strawberry.”

“I was just kidding, Gary,” Clarence protested.

“I know Clarence, me too,” Gary winked at Ron.

Ron looked around the small bedroom. By the time they put in a bunk bed and got all the equipment set up, the room was going to be nothing but elbows and butts.

“Hey Gar,” Ron said, “You’d better have David bring down your other two office chairs. I don’t think there’s going to be room for the equipment and the bunks. We’ll just have to sleep in the chairs.”

“Nah,” Gary said, “We’ll put in a crib mattress and two chairs. And, we’ll work 16 on and 8 off.”

“What I don’t understand is why we don’t just put in 2 chairs and no mattress,” Clarence said. “The person who is off can go home and sleep.”

“Man,” Ron said, “I love it when a plan comes together.”

What they finally worked out was that the person coming on shift would sit in front of the window seat for 8 hours. Then, he’d move to the radio chair for the next 8 hours. After that, he’d get to go home for 8 hours. The guy at the window got to observe and, since he was the freshest, would get to shoot the rifle and/or a Thumper. How long they could keep it up was anyone’s guess, but if ever there were 3 men who could work together in such a haphazard plan, it was The Three Amigos! Gary had, by the way, retrieved his hat. He put a large Band-Aid over the hole and wore the hat as sort of a badge of honor. That hat had a lot of life left in it yet; the grease ring around the brim was still an inch

away from the grease ring extending out from the hatband. When the rings met, he was going to submit the hat to Guinness as a world record. That would probably be another three years, if he lived that long.

Getting back to the plan, there were about a dozen or so different kinds of radios sitting on the table and floor. Since Gary was the Ham, they decided that he should try to figure out how each radio worked and then he could explain it to the less technically gifted. Six hours and 6,000 cuss words later, Gary threw up his hands and stormed out of the room, muttering under his breath. Well, maybe the plan hadn't come together after all. Why couldn't the military just have a single radio that covered every channel and every possible encryption scheme? In fact, the military was working on just such a system, JTRS, but it was still in the development/testing stage. Gary came back a few minutes later.

"Look guys," Gary admitted, "I'm in way over my head here. Maybe having all of these military radio sets isn't all that hot of an idea."

"Gar-Bear, we need those communications," Ron said.

"What for?" Gary asked. As nearly as I can figure out, some of that stuff is ground-to-air and some of it is ground-to-ground. They got AM, FM and IDFKM."

"What's IDFKM?" Clarence asked.

"I don't fricking know modulation," Gary laughed. "That tyrant who took over the country is going to die of old age before I ever figure these radios out."

"You know who took over the country?" Clarence asked.

"That Wannabe Wesley Clark," Gary said, "I thought you had it figured out by now."

"Well, that makes sense," Ron said, "He always did remind me of Alexander Haig."

"Who?" Clarence asked.

"You know Clarence," Ron said, "Remember when Reagan got shot and that ex-general told the country, 'I am in control here.'"

"Oh that guy," Clarence said, "What does he have to do with Clark?"

"Nothing really, except they were both commanders of NATO," Gary explained.

"My, my."

"Look we sort of got off the subject of radios," Gary said, "Why don't we let Derek take the military sets over to the trailer park and the soldier boys can play with them? We can

work 8 on and 16 off and keep the OP manned 24/7.”

“You mean 7/24, right?” Ron asked.

“Ok Ron we’ll man it 7 hours a day, 24 days a week, if you’d rather,” Gary laughed.

[Never pass up a chance to shoot one over the bow of a friend, right friend? - Inside joke for Fleataxi]

“So, who gets what shift?” Ron asked.

“We could have someone pull a double shift every 3rd day and resume the rotation at that point,” Clarence suggested, “That way, we’d be rotating shifts.”

“Suits me,” Gary said.

“I agree,” Ron said.

The three men had just wasted a whole day on that little exercise.

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“Derek, would you pull that military comm. gear out of the OP and put it in the trailer park?” Gary asked.

“Why, I went to a lot of work to get you that gear?” Derek objected.

“And I appreciate that son,” Gary said, “But it’s over my head. We have enough trouble just running the Ham gear. Did you interview those recruits?”

“Yep and we had a ringer,” Derek said.

“What did you do with him, or don’t I want to know?” Gary asked.

“Her and let’s just say that Damon got a little target practice and let it go at that,” Derek replied.

“Oh,” Gary thought, “Probably called her Mutt just before he pulled the trigger, too.”

In the coming days, it would become apparent that word somehow filtered out that one of the people that Roy and Jim had recruited turned out to be a ‘spy’ planted to catch militia groups. From that point on, the first words out of prospective candidates mouths was usually something like, “I ain’t no spy”.

17Mar05...

The big day had arrived and true to his word, Gary showed up at Ron's with a pair of pliers. Ron had completely forgotten that Gary had said something about pulling the staples sealing his incision with a pair of pliers. Gary reminded him and Ron grudgingly started to pull the staples.

"Ouch, take it easy," Gary complained.

"It was your idea to pull the staples with a pair of pliers, partner, don't blame me," Ron said defensively.

"I've had all kinds of staples pulled and they just used fancy pliers, PAL," Gary said, "Try to just take a hold of the staple and not my head."

"Yeah, you're a real tough guy aren't you," Ron said pulling the second staple.

"OUCH, I said just the staple," Gary hollered. "Stop! Never mind, get me a hand mirror and I'll do it myself."

Ron went to the bathroom and brought back a mirror. He held the mirror and Gary pulled the staples. If the truth were told, it hurt worse than when Ron had done it, but Gar-Bear wasn't going to give Ronald the satisfaction. It sure was good it was a small incision with only 5 staples, or Gary would have probably left the last one in and let it rust out. The rotation schedule was working out well and the squad was up to 33 men plus Damon and Derek. David's boys wanted in but Derek was able to convince them without hurting their feelings too badly that they just didn't have the experience. However, he wanted them to feel a part of, as the expression goes, and assigned them duties to support his squads.

It was Sunday and Derek had decided that it was time to get off the dime. The CNG had set up a command post in the AV Mall at 10th Street West and Avenue P. Derek was going to snipe from the K-Mart roof on the other side of 10th St. and Damon was going to cover his back and spot. A second sniper team was on top of the fire station straight south of the parking lot on the other side of P. The third sniper pair was on top of the 24-hour fitness center. Derek had the M1A and the other two teams were outfitted with the M-40's. The other 29 men were spread out in the shadows of some of the buildings to provide cover fire, if needed.

They had been observing the HQ for about 5 days. Every evening, the time varied from 9 to 11, the unit commands assembled for a briefing that lasted from 30 minutes to an hour. The CNG troops were arrogant and security was pretty relaxed.

Derek felt the tap on his shoulder. He was using the day scope because the parking lot was lit up like a festival was taking place. He shifted the M1A, spotted the target and slowly squeezed the trigger. You could barely hear the report from the rifle and an officer went down. The guards flattened themselves on the ground looking for the source of the shot they hadn't heard. Nothing. Then one of the guards jerked and dropped his

rifle. The man next to him half rose to run and went down, the back of his head missing. Apart from the grunts and cries the men made when they'd been hit, not a sound had been heard and the officers inside of the cp were unaware of the attack in progress. The men moved from the shadows to get within range of their 40mm grenade launchers. Everyone was equipped with a 2-meter hand held radio with an earplug.

"Now," the command came in their earpieces. There was a succession of plops and the tent went up, hit simultaneously with 4 HEDP rounds. They moved in, dispatched the wounded and grabbed all of the maps and papers they could find. The elapsed time from Derek's first shot until they had the documents and had cleared the area was under 4 minutes.

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Back at Grecian Isle, they sorted through the papers.

"Derek, check this out," Roy said.

"What do you have?" Derek said taking the document.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but that's a list of the relocation camps in southern California," Roy replied.

"You're right," Derek said, "I've got to get this to the OP. Good work tonight people. I'll let you know tomorrow what the next target is. Roy, could I have a private word with you?"

Roy rose and followed Derek out of the trailer.

"What do you need boss?" Roy asked.

"I have to recommend improvements, if we need any, do you have any suggestions?" Derek asked.

"One," Roy said, "It seems to me we didn't need to take all 35 people tonight; we could have gotten by with 12."

"Anything else?" Derek asked.

"Well, it would be nice to have a cold case of beer in the fridge when we get back from an operation," Roy said raising his hands, "You asked."

"Trailer 37 Roy," Derek said, "But keep down the noise."

Preparations – Chapter 32 – Relocation Centers

18Mar05...

“How did the operation go?” Ron asked.

“Good guys 1, Bad guys 0,” Derek said.

“Any trouble?” Gary asked.

“No. We have one suggestion,” Derek said. “We took all 35 people and only needed about 12. It was suggested that we only take enough to do the job.”

“Any other suggestions?” Gary asked again.

“Only that we have some cold beer on hand for after an operation,” Derek said.

“I thought you...” Gary started to say.

“I did, but I didn’t tell them until the subject was brought up.

“Did you recover any good intel from the command post?” Clarence asked.

“How about a list of all the relocation centers in southern California?” Derek said, smiling. “We haven’t been through it all, but I thought that you should see the list.”

“Forty?” Gary was surprised.

“So it appears, Dad,” Derek said.

“Well, what do you two think?” Gary said passing the list to Ron.

“I think that is too many camps to hit all at once,” Ron said handing the list to Clarence, “And once we hit one, they will beef up security at the others.”

“Ron, I heard there are some other groups in the AV, how about we divide up the list and share it with them?”

“Derek?” Ron asked.

“We only know of 3 other groups, but there are probably a dozen.”

“How many camps could our group hit at once?” Gary asked.

“With the number of people we have, 3,” Derek suggested.

“Do you have any other potential recruits?” Clarence asked.

“Maybe after the word about tonight gets around,” Derek suggested, “But, and it’s a big but, I think they will try to step up efforts to infiltrate the groups, so I’m a little leery.”

“If you just had one more person,” Gary said, “You would have 3 squads of 12.”

“How about Matt?” Ron asked.

“The closest he’s ever been to the military was to attend the Open House at Edwards AFB,” Gary replied, “No, I don’t think so.”

“There’s a gal in Mary’s group we could use until we get one more man,” Derek suggested.

“I thought we were going to keep the units unisex,” Ron said.

“We were, but she’s ex-Marine Corps,” Derek replied. “We could use her on one operation, just to see how she works out.”

“What did she do in the Corps?” Clarence asked.

“Squad leader,” Derek answered.

“It’s ok by me for one operation. What do you two think?”

“One operation,” Ron said, “But what are we going to do if she works out well? Will she be willing to go back to the female squad?”

“She’d do it if we asked, Ron,” Derek said, “But I’m having second thoughts about this unisex squad concept. We have 13 women besides Mary. If we were to split them up among the squads, we could take out 4 relocation camps at a shot. And another thing, I doubt they will be able to up the security at the remaining camps because they will be too busy trying to round up the refugees.”

“I seem to remember telling you that you could run your outfit as you please,” Gary said, “So if Ron and Clarence agree, maybe you should go ahead and do that. Ron, what do you think?”

“If we hit 4 camps ourselves and give the locations of some of the other camps to the AV groups we know about, it would sure throw a monkey wrench in FEMA’s face. I say go.”

“Clarence, what do you think?” Gary asked.

“I don’t know, but I’ll go along with whatever Derek recommends,” Clarence answered.

“Looks like you have a go Derek, when do you plan to start?” Gary asked.

“Wednesday night,” Derek said.

“Ok give us a list of frequencies and times and report in using the Bible code,” Gary said.

“I made up a list of prepackaged phrases, we can use Dad,” Derek said, handing Gary a list. “It should cover 99% of all situations and will be a lot easier than dragging around a Bible.”

“Are you going to hit one set of camps and then return, or hit all of the camps on your list?” Gary asked.

“All of them, over the course of one week,” Derek said, “Then we lay low for a week and start something else.”

“Keep your powder dry,” Gary said. “And let me know how many groups are going to be in on this project with you.”

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Derek was on the spot. He hadn't even known about the militia groups until Gary had said something about them back in '91 or '92 when Damon and he were out on summer visitation. It was a classic case of overplaying your hand. He headed for the trailer park to talk to Roy.

“Roy, you said you're from Lancaster didn't you?” Derek inquired.

“Lived there my whole life,” Roy smiled.

“I overheard Jim and you and a couple of others talking about the militia groups and mentioned that to the old guys,” Derek explained. “How would I get in touch with these other groups?”

“Might be tough, boss,” Roy frowned, “They don't exactly walk around with jackets with militia logos.”

“Ask around would you. We need to get in touch with them within the next 24 hours,” Derek said. “Oh, we're going to integrate Mary's units into the squads. We have a big operation starting and we need more people. It's going to take a week or so.”

“What's up?” Roy asked.

“That list you found, the one with all of the relocation camps,” Derek said, “What would

happen if someone were to take out the guards at one of those camps?”

“All hell would break loose, probably,” Roy speculated, his eyebrows shooting up.

“And if someone were to hit all of the camps in say a one week period?” “Derek pursued the thought.

“Oh crap, all hell really would break loose,” Roy said, “How are we going to manage that?”

“That’s why I need those other militia groups,” Derek explained. “We’re going to divide our group into 4 squads of 12 persons each. You’re going to be in charge of one squad, and I’ll take a second. Any ideas on who should lead the other two?”

“I say Jim and Damon, but I want Jim with me,” Roy answered.

“And where I go, Damon goes,” Derek said.

“You could get Becky,” Roy said, “She was a squad leader in the Corps. Other than that, I don’t really know.”

“Damon and I will figure that out. Why don’t you and Jim get in contact with the other 3 militia groups, somehow,” Derek suggested. “And when you do, give them each one of these list of targets and explain what I explained to you. If there’s time, I’d like to meet with them, but if not, so be it.”

“No promises, but we’ll give it a shot,” Roy agreed.

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It’s never wise to show your hole cards; Roy hadn’t. At one time, before he’d joined the Guard, he’d been part of one of the Lancaster militia groups. That’s how he’d met Jim; Jim had been a member of another group and they gone out to the desert back in ‘97 and done joint exercises with their camouflaged 4x4’s and paint guns. The AV militia groups were very active, but they had turned secretive when the population soared starting in the ‘80’s. Some of the folks were pretty long in the tooth, but there never seemed to be an end of new members graduating from Lancaster High School. And, it wouldn’t be too smart to look under their beds, either; you’d probably meet up with the guy’s pet rattlesnake!

There were more AR-15’s with auto sears in Lancaster than there were M16’s in the CNG. Some of these people acted like they’d never heard of the Assault Weapons Ban and that the California gun laws were a shopping list rather than a prohibition. Hell, one group even had a .50 caliber club. You wouldn’t find any of those people in relocation camps either. The way Roy had heard it, the Cuban Missile Crisis back in the 1960’s had spooked a lot of people in Lancaster who worked at Edwards AFB. They’d seen

those B-47's on the flight line loaded with nukes and had gone home and started stocking up. Then, their children had picked up the ball and run with it later on. The hardest part was getting from Palmdale to Lancaster. If Derek wanted a meeting with the leaders of those groups, Jim and he would oblige and they'd have that meeting tonight.

This group they'd put together in so short a time was on a first name basis. Not because they'd all become pals, but because you couldn't tell someone something you didn't know. Where 2 or 3 men had the same first names, nicknames were used. Derek couldn't let Damon lead a squad, because for all of his accomplishments, Damon wasn't the leader type. He was more like the *Rebel Without a Cause* type. And a very good thief. One of the more common names was Bob and they'd ended up using the names of the 7 dwarfs to keep the guys straight. Derek had talked to 'Doc' and put him in charge of the 4th squad.

Derek had said something to his brother about the .50s needing suppressors and Damon said they already had Elite Iron suppressors. Derek almost had to be careful what he talked about around Damon. The M-40's had come with suppressors. Altogether, they had 9 suppressed sniper rifles, the M1A, 2 M-40's and 4 M82's, 2 TAC-50s and that didn't include Ron's Super Match or his Dad's loaded model M1A.

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The leaders of the militia groups had been doing their own thing, but were itching for some real action. That night, Derek had outlined the plan to them at the hastily assembled meeting and they had all agreed. One of the leaders went by Manny, the second by Moe and the third by Jack. There was something about those names, but Derek couldn't quite put his finger on it.

19Mar05...

"Ok," Derek said, "I talked to the other leaders, and they're in."

"Who are they?" Gary asked.

"One is named Manny, the second Moe and the third Jack," Derek answered.

When the laughter died down, Derek asked what was so funny.

"Nothing, Derek," Ron said, "But from now on, just refer to them as the Pep Boys, and we'll know who you are talking about."

"Huh?" Derek responded.

"It's a chain of car parts stores son," Gary explained, "Called the Pep Boys and the three founders were guys named Manny, Moe and Jack."

Preparations – Chapter 33 – Lemmings

They were going to hit 4 locations Wednesday night. That figured to be the easiest night. After that, they were going to reform in the Sierra foothills east of Fresno and divide into 3 enhanced squads of 16 each. Each of the four-militia groups was going to take out 10 camps. Then, as had been mentioned, they were going to lay low for a week while things sorted themselves out. This ought to be fun to watch, hundreds of thousands of people going in all directions with the CNG and FEMA folks trying to round them up. Of course, some of them might come through the Antelope Valley, but the camps were mostly located in the areas where the people lived. The Pep Boys were going to take out the 2 Relocation Camps in the Antelope Valley, among others, and send those people scurrying back to the San Fernando Valley.

“Why do we have to take the camps furthest to the north?” Damon asked Derek.

“Well, bro, we had an extra day to organize and I wanted to see California,” Derek replied. “The only place Dad ever took us was to Disneyland, Magic Mountain, Knott’s Berry Farm, Marine Land, and the LaBrea Tar Pits. He must have been the original Disneyland Daddy. I think there must be more to California than amusement parks.”

“Speaking of that,” Damon said, “That was a pretty crappy trick Mom played on Dad, making us wear our oldest worn out clothes and sending us to California with big empty suitcases.”

“Maybe that’s why she died of lung cancer Damon,” Derek said, “She didn’t even smoke. You have to give Dad and Sharon credit though, they managed to pay every penny of child support, keep us in clothes and braces and everything else. You know, Mom had full custody, she could have covered us with her insurance instead of making Dad cover us with his.”

“I don’t want to talk about it,” Damon said. “So we’re going to Monterey, huh? Where’s Monterey?”

“Do you mean besides the same place it’s always been? On the coast, south of San Francisco a ways,” Derek explained.

They arrived in the Monterey area on Wednesday afternoon. The FEMA camp was at Pebble Beach. From the looks of it, there were maybe 3-dozen guards, some in towers and some on foot. They had used 4 2½-ton trucks and just acted like a CNG unit being relocated. Gary had suggested that they take I-5 to 152 and then go to Gilroy, the garlic capital. From there, they’d taken 101 to Salinas and 68 to Monterey. This was going to be tough, it was a very large camp and the guards were well spread out. It was going to be a reach for the Derek’s sniper rifle, but the other team had a .50 cal so they could really reach out and touch someone. Derek took Damon’s advice and moved 8 people close in with their silenced M16’s. They could take out the foot patrols and the two sniper teams would work on the towers.

It had worked like a charm. None of the guards even knew what had hit them. But the people just milled around inside of the camp as if they liked the place. Finally, Derek had gone to the camp and gotten on the PA system.

“You’re free, people,” he announced. A few bolted for the gates, but many just sat stunned. He was just about to make a second announcement when they began to move, like lemmings to the sea. The squad mounted up and bugged out before they got caught in the growing stampede. They back tracked, taking 152 to 99 and south to the Fresno area. Everyone assembled in a little community named Tollhouse. They were going to lie over for a day, reassemble and strike again Friday night. They compared notes on how the operations at the 4 camps had gone and what they needed to do to improve their approach. Clearly, they needed more snipers.

“Damon, how about you round up some M-24 SWS units or some more M-40’s?” Derek asked.

“What’s an M-24 SWS?” Damon asked.

“It’s that new bolt action 7.62x51 rifle that Remington builds for the Army,” Derek said.

“What do they look like?” Damon asked.

“They are a bolt action 7.62x51 caliber rifle with an adjustable buttstock,” Derek explained. “They’ll probably be in a case with a bunch of spares and maybe a night scope. For sure, they’ll have a Leopold scope. Don’t you know anything?”

“I was an ET in the Navy Derek, what do I know about rifles?” Damon protested. “I can repair and operate every piece of comm gear the Navy has.”

“If you’re such a whiz with comm gear, why didn’t you help Dad and the guys out?” Derek said.

“Nobody asked,” Damon said, “And the first thing I learned in boot camp was never volunteer.”

“Get suppressors for the rifles, too,” Derek said shaking his head. “And, the M-24 uses special ammo called M-118LR, so get a few cases of it while you’re at it.”

“Anything else while I’m at it?” Damon asked. “How about a hot and cold running blonde?”

“Nah,” Derek said, “Dad tried that. Didn’t work out too well.”

“I met her,” Damon said, “Met both of them, they were pretty.”

“Yeah, I’ll bet,” Derek said, “Pretty on the outside, but ugly to the core.”

“Well, that Marie did try to get me in bed, now that you mention it,” Damon said.

“You should have helped yourself,” Derek said.

“I would have,” Damon said, “But I was afraid the stupid would rub off. If her brain was $\frac{1}{10}$ th the size of her boobs, she would have had an IQ of 300.”

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23Mar05...

The days didn’t seem to mean much anymore. Hell, the three old guys were using an old calendar and had the dates all screwed up. That didn’t make a lot of sense, all they had to do was look at their computers, but no, they had reset the dates on the computers to match the calendar rather than the other way around. Anyway, the operations at the other camps had gone off without a hitch and people were running about all over the place. The CNG and FEMA, as predicted, were totally overwhelmed. One bunch had tried to enter Palmdale proper, but a bunch of the locals had driven them off. Most of the refugees in the AV had headed back to the Valley and it turned out that a lot of them had a shotgun or a .22 in their closet. The Guard was taking a beating and the FEMA people had stopped wearing the black jackets with FEMA emblazoned on the back.

The Palmdale militia was safely tucked away in the trailer park waiting out the chaos. They were running a limited intelligence operation and it appeared that they were in trouble. After the CNG and FEMA fold had wasted a few days trying to round up the refugees, they’d given up and done a little reorganization themselves. Now, they were assembled in several locations, and it looked like they might have ironed out the wrinkles. Those that remained were a dedicated lot and they weren’t slouches.

“If word of this California situation gets out,” Clark said, “We’re screwed.”

“We’ve been monitoring the Ham bands General,” an adviser said, “And it’s already gotten out.”

“And?” Clark asked.

“We had no idea that there were so many militia groups around the country,” the adviser continued. “It’s not like an organized attack; it’s just picking away at the camp administrations and letting the people out. We couldn’t contain the situation if we had 20 Divisions. And, those troops start arriving back from Europe and the Middle East any day now. You factor them into the equation and I think our hind ends are grass. All that radio speech you made did was to inflame the public.”

“Well, reorganize the FEMA and Guard Units and force Bush to make another speech,”

Clark said. "Have him say that people loyal to him have succeeded in putting down the coup and that he's back in charge. By the way, did anyone figure out what he said in the previous speech that set everyone off?"

"We did, yes," the adviser said, "Do you remember the bit about him having a revelation on the 6th and 8th days? That was a Bible code and it referred to the Book of Revelations, Chapter 6, Verse 8."

"Was there anything else in the speech that gave us away?" Clark asked, "Surely it can't be that simple."

"Not that we know of, no," the adviser assured him.

"Well then, get him to make another speech and get it on the air tonight," Clark said, "We've got to get the population settled down."

Bush was only more than willing to make another speech. It went out on the radio the night of 19Mar05.

The three old geezers and probably most of the country were assembled around radio to listen to the speech.

My fellow Americans,

"Your government has been restored. The traitor, Wesley Clark, has been arrested and imprisoned by your government. Your government is reorganizing its military and FEMA forces to help the people. Your government has recalled the troops from Iraq, Korea and the Middle East.

Posse Comitatus and the Writ of Habeas Corpus have been restored and the FEMA police powers rescinded. Internet communications and telephone communications are no longer being fully monitored by your government.

Unfortunately, your government must continue food rationing for the present moment.

Barbara and I are grateful for the efforts made by all Americans to restore order and it has been restored. Be of good cheer.

"Bullcrap," Ron said, "It's all a lie. It was more of than your government crap and Barbara is his mother, not his wife."

"I wouldn't believe a word about the Internet and the phone either," Gary added.

"What is his wife's name?" Clarence asked.

"Laura, dimwit," Ron teased Clarence.

“Oh, the way he said it, it sounded so natural,” Clarence observed.

“They must be getting worried,” Gary suggested, “Or why would they have risked letting him give another speech, especially one that was so obviously a lie?”

“What I don’t understand is why they didn’t pick up on the ‘your government’ bit,” Ron said. “Is Wesley Clark that dumb?”

“Must be, chief,” Gary replied, “Bush pulled it off again. Say, you know all those problems we were having with those military radios? Derek reminded me that Damon was an ET in the Navy and knows how to operate and repair all of that equipment.”

“Why didn’t he say something?” Clarence asked.

“He told Derek that no one asked and he wasn’t going to volunteer,” Gary related.

“He sounds a lot like you, Gar-Bear,” Ron observed.

“Ah, forget it,” Gary said, “We have enough radio equipment already.” (Sour grapes?)

“What’s our next operation going to be?” Clarence asked.

“I think we should lay low for a few more days, Clarence, and let the dust settle,” Ron suggested.

“Yeah, that speech was probably intended to get the population to settle down” Gary said, “So let’s oblige. If we take a few days off, maybe they won’t trip to the fact that Bush put another fast one over on them.

Clark had listened to the speech. It had sounded fine to him right up to the point where Dubya had said Barbara. What a bunch of idiots. He asked that the adviser who had been in charge of the speech project be brought to the command center at Mt. Weather.

“Did you screen that speech?” Clark asked.

“Sounded fine to me, General,” the adviser said.

“Butthead,” Clark said, drawing his service pistol, “Barbara is his mother, not his wife.” General Clark shot the adviser right between the eyes. One of the other advisers taking in the scene was reminded of Saddam Hussein. What had they gotten themselves into?

Preparations – Chapter 34 – The Lull

It was probably just as well that they were taking time off. Damon wasn't his usual self and was having trouble coming up with any additional sniper rifles. He was just looking in the wrong places, but it took him a while to figure that out. It finally occurred to him that he might find some in Bakersfield and off he went to search. Bakersfield was a scary place because a lot of people who lived in LA fled not back to the Valley, but further away as had been their original intent. Normally a city of about 220,000, the population had swelled to closer to ½ million. There were all kinds of resources for the adept scrounger, however. There was a CHP office, the Kern County Sheriff's office and Bakersfield Police department. The CNG also had established a major presence near the city and Damon fit right in wearing his uniform.

Nobody paid him much attention and it took under 3 hours to appropriate the SWAT equipment held by the LEO's. Not only did he come away with some of the police sniper rifles, he made a killing on the H & K MP5's. "Maybe," he thought on the drive back to Palmdale, "I should try one of these machine guns." Derek told him to help himself, but if he took one, he was going to have to come up with more 9mm ammo, because 9mm wasn't that prevalent in the housing tract.

Ninety minutes later, there was enough 9mm ammo to fight a major battle, because Damon loved a challenge. Derek was singularly unimpressed with the 9mm MP5. The only vest the bullets would penetrate 100% of the time was level I. If the person you shot was wearing a level IIa or higher rated vest, you'd be better off with a ball bat. He told Damon to take one for himself and to put the rest of them in the basement. Or, give them to the old guys in the OP; they'd probably be fascinated with the toy guns.

As it was, Derek felt they were under gunned with the M16's. What he really wanted was some of that new ammo, the M995 5.56x45 and the M993 7.62x51 cartridges. The new 7.62x51 ammo would punch through a level IV vest like a hot knife through butter and the 5.56x45 ammo was nearly as good. When he told Damon to try and find some, Damon almost flipped. Why the hell, he wanted to know, hadn't his brother said something earlier? There were all kinds of the crap where he'd gotten the 9mm stuff. Good Derek told him, go for it. Derek got Roy and Jim to go along, he didn't want Damon to strain himself.

The consolidation of the federal forces was presenting real problems. While there were half as many FEMA folks and CNG, those that remained were the nasty ones. Anyone with a compassionate bone in his or her body had bugged out since the attacks on the camps. Some had joined militias, but most had simply found their families and gone into hiding. The lull had the negative effect of allowing the feds to consolidate, but it also gave the still green squads time to coalesce.

They used the now empty trailer park as a practice field of sorts and were getting fairly adept at urban warfare. Some of the trailers would never keep out the rain again, at least not without a major overhaul, but the squads were in pretty good shape. Each

squad was now equipped with 3 sniper rifles; some had 2 7.62x51's and 1 .50 cal and others had 2 .50's and 1 7.62x51. Everyone who was not a sniper was a grenadier, as there was a surplus of the M203's and 40mm grenades.

The new ammo, the M993 and M995 was also a Godsend. The M993 was totally suitable for shooting in the M-24 SWS and M-40's. If there was one advantage to the M16's, it was the amount of ammo they could carry. They had a lot of magazines and every couple days swapped them out. That was quite a chore when you carried 18 loaded magazines plus the one in your rifle. They had their choice of gear, MOLLE or ALICE, but had elected to go with good old ALICE, she was a sweetheart. Both were compatible with the interceptor vest, so it really didn't make any difference. Add a dozen 40mm grenades to the mix plus 2 canteens of water and your belt was full and heavy. And, it left no room for a pistol so they hit every gun store in the area and rounded up the Miami Vice holster rigs like Sonny Crockett wore. (Jackass rigs)

The three old geezers had spent the lull trying to decide where they wanted to strike next and couldn't agree. They had initially thought about northern California, but apparently northern California had a couple of patriots left and all the camps had been attacked and the internees freed. They heard on the radio that troops were starting to arrive back in the US, but the radio also had some disturbing news. It seems that the troops were being confined to their bases/posts and news of what had happened to the country was being withheld from them. They assumed that with Clark still in charge, he was afraid of what would happen if the troops found out about the coup.

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01Apr05...Command bunker, Mt. Weather...

"General Clark, the troops are getting restless. How much longer do you think you can keep them bottled up on those bases and posts?" the Colonel asked.

"Did you send them the porn flicks and the whores?" Clark asked.

"We followed orders, sir, but you must have a pretty low opinion of the American fighting men and women," the Colonel said, "The attendance fell off real quick at the movies and if those broads weren't on the payroll and eating in the mess halls, they'd starve to death."

"The booze?" Clark asked.

"You made a few alcoholics pretty happy, but no sir, few takers," the Colonel answered. "The troops just want to go home to their families. Can you blame them, General?"

"I expect you people to keep a lid on this situation," Clark boomed. "We can't have them finding out there's been a coup. Not yet, anyway."

“You should have just left them in Iraq, Kosovo and Korea General, you’ve opened up a big can of worms,” the Colonel suggested.

“You and my son make quite a pair Colonel,” Clark said, “Maybe you’d like to join him mopping floors.”

“It would beat the hell out of trying to stuff a wet noodle up a wildcat’s butt General,” the Colonel snapped.

“You’re forgetting yourself Colonel. When I was in the Army, these 4 Stars meant I outranked you,” Clark fumed.

“You aren’t in the Army anymore are you Wes?” the Colonel stood his ground. “You’re a has been retired General who only got one state in the primaries for the 2004 election. And, Kerry wouldn’t even consider you for the ticket. I wish you had been on the ticket; then the country would know what a loser both of you were.”

Clark had about enough of the shouting match with the Colonel. He pressed the buzzer on his desk to summon a guard.

“Yes Sir?” the guard asked.

“Take that traitorous SOB out and shoot him,” Clark ordered.

“Yes Sir,” the guard said pulling his pistol, “Let’s go Colonel.”

The Colonel snapped to attention, turned on his heel and left the room. After they were out of the outer office, the guard, holstering his pistol, said, “Guess you were right Colonel, the SOB is crazy. Your helicopter is warmed up on the pad, Sir, next stop is Ft. Benning Georgia.”

The Colonel was one of several officers who had been charmed by Wesley Clark but had seen through the coup too late to stop the bombings of the cities. They hadn’t even learned Clark was behind the bombings until Bush made his first speech. They had been, for several weeks, planning on overthrowing Clark and restoring power to President Bush. They had to move slowly and carefully because Clark had quite a few backers. Although Clark had bemoaned the deaths of Kennedy, Schumer and Clinton, the Colonel suspected that Clark was directly responsible for their deaths. Not that it was any great loss, but the General seemed to have lost a lot of competition when they’d died.

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“What we ought to do is raid a military post,” Ron said.

“Yeah right,” Gary said, “We’ll put our 48 best up against a few thousand of the Army’s

best.”

“Aren’t there any Army posts that aren’t heavily staffed?” Clarence asked.

“What about Fort Irwin up by Barstow?” Ron asked.

“Hell, how should I know?” Gary said, “I was in the Air Force from ‘61 to ‘65.”

“I thought you’d been to Ft. Irwin,” Ron said.

“Never on the post, just at the ‘50’s café to meet Derek, Gary replied. “But, Derek should know.”

“Then get his young butt over here and we’ll ask him,” Ron said.

“Yes, Mother,” Gary replied.

Later...

“So how about you tell us about Ft. Irwin?” Ron asked.

“There’re lots of sand, land and soldiers,” Derek replied.

“Oh,” Ron said, “It wouldn’t be a good place to raid, huh?”

“It would be a great place to raid, Ron,” Derek disagreed, “I just don’t know how practical it would be. The United States Army Garrison consists of Headquarters and Headquarters Company, Military Police Company, Directorate of Information Management, Directorate of Public Works, the Civilian Personnel Advisory Center, Directorate of Community Activities, and the Provost Marshall’s Office. HQ & HQ Company consist of 255 soldiers from those directorates plus those from the G-1, G-2, G-3, DOC, IG, SJA, PAO, Chapel and the Command Group. On top of that, 4,000-5,000 soldiers from other installations rotate through the NTC each month.”

“I guess we should forget it, then,” Ron said, “It was a bad idea.”

“Not necessarily, Ron,” Derek hedged, “They also train Military Police there. Now, if we were present ourselves as MP’s there on an infiltration training mission, we might be able to pull it off.”

“How could that work?” Clarence asked.

“Didn’t you ever read any of Richard Marcinko’s novels?” Derek asked, “You know the Rogue Warrior series?”

“I read a couple,” Gary said, “It was fantasy BS.”

“It wasn’t either,” Derek said. “Well maybe a little, but if he could do it, we can do it.”

“Hell boy, you can’t even swim,” Gary said.

“Dad, you don’t have to swim to be sneaky,” Derek smiled, “Damon can’t swim either.”

“Mission approved,” Ron said.

“Who died and put you in charge?” Gary asked.

“Do you disagree, Gar-Bear?” Ron asked.

“No, but that’s not the point,” Gary said.

“I agree with the mission, too, Ron, but Gary’s got a point,” Clarence said.

“Go ahead Derek and I’ll work it out with these other old geezers,” Ron laughed.

Derek left, but his head was swimming, even if he couldn’t. He’d just brought up Marcinko to make a point. On the other hand, he had been through the National Training Center twice and Mary had been there once, that was where they’d met. She’d seen parts of the base he hadn’t and vice versa. He’d better get Damon in on this, too. Hmm, maybe not because Mary did not like Damon; Damon and his crazy behavior made her nervous. He decided to get as much information from Mary as he could and then get with Damon, Roy, Becky and Doc separately. Maybe the five of them could figure out a plan that would work.

Mary knew a lot about the base that he didn’t. He told her what they were planning to do and she said she ought to go along with them. He nixed that idea quickly, if the plan went south on them, it just wouldn’t do to leave Elizabeth and Joshua without a parent. Mary insisted that she participate in the planning, however. Derek warned her that Damon would be there. That was ok, she said, as long as she didn’t have to sit next to him. Besides, she said, she’d also been an MP and there were a few things she knew about that that they didn’t teach Derek at Ft. Stewart before he went to Kosovo.

02Apr05...

They all got together at the trailer park at 9am the next morning. Mary started the meeting off by greeting Damon with, “Hi butthead, how’s it hanging?”

Preparations – Chapter 35 – The NTC

Damon started to come out of his chair but caught Derek out of the corner of his eye. The look on Derek's face spoke volumes. Damon didn't know what she was so angry about. True he'd moved in for a week and stayed six months, but what the hell, he'd made his bed once in a while and it wasn't like he'd eaten them out of home. He clearly remembered buying a box of those sugared donuts once or twice. Sheesh, what did they expect; he looked faithfully for work every Sunday in the Des Moines Register's want ads. And even let Derek read the paper before he'd taken it to his room and looked at it behind closed doors. He didn't even complain when she'd only made macaroni and cheese for dinner and he hated macaroni and cheese. And it wasn't like he didn't work; he'd had 8 or was it 9 jobs in those six months. But he could never find a fair employer; people had always expected him to work.

Anyway, he listened up while she explained all about what MP's did. Nothing new there, he watched them enough, and figured out how they operated before he'd pulled a job. Anyway this ideas of Derek's was a harebrained scheme. It was different dealing with those part-time warriors up at the Sheriff's Station in Lancaster. They usually just looked at the paperwork and never called anyone to check on its authenticity. Derek was going to infiltrate Ft. Irwin for real, or so it seemed. Derek had a list of equipment he wanted to acquire, and Damon couldn't figure out what Derek wanted with those M1026A1 Hummers equipped with M2 Machine guns and Mk-19 grenade launchers. All they really needed was some M35 deuce and half's and some of the M-809 5-ton 6-bys and a few M1114 Up-Armored Hummers. At least Derek didn't have an Abrams tank on the list.

They spent most of the day refining their plan. Derek concluded they needed written orders authorizing the infiltration in case they got caught. They also concluded that they needed someone on the outside to cover their backs. It had to be someone that no one would ever suspect. They discussed it quite a while, but couldn't agree on whom to use. Damon finally got over his pouting and solved the problem.

"We'll use Dad," Damon said.

"Dad can barely walk 200 yards," Derek objected.

"Baloney," Damon said, "He walks Missy around the tract every day and that's 4 blocks. But if you think he can't handle it we'll send Ron too."

"Wherever those two go, Clarence is sure to follow," Derek replied, "So I guess the Three Amigos ride again."

"Did they ride before?" Damon asked.

"You know what I mean," Derek smiled.

When they had the details worked out, Derek went to talk with his Dad.

“Did you figure something out?” Ron asked.

“Where’s Dad?” Derek asked.

“I’ll get him,” Ron said. He picked up the mike to the CB radio and yelled into it, “Gar-Bear, get your lazy butt back to the OP.”

“Where’s Clarence?” Derek asked between chortles.

“I’ll get him, too,” Ron said. He picked up the CB mike again. “Clarence. Oh, Clarence. Yoo-hoo, Clarence. Please come to the OP, when you have a moment.”

“You guys ought to take that act on the road,” Derek said.

“We’ve been all through that,” Ron smirked.

When the three geezers had assembled, Derek explained what he had in mind. The three men could plunk their tired old butt’s down in a booth at Peggy’s and keep an eye out for them.

“Suits me,” Gary said, “They have real fountain cokes.”

“They have any chitterlings?” Clarence asked.

“You’ll have to settle for French fries, Clarence,” Gary said.

“Darn,” Clarence replied, “I was looking forward to chitterlings.”

“You’d better take your insulin with you Gar-Bear,” Ron advised.

“The problem I have with drinking cokes is it lowers my blood sugar,” Gary said, “I’ll have to load up on fries, too.”

“How can that be?” Clarence said, “Coke is pure sugar.”

This was neither the time nor the place to explain reactive hypoglycemia to the men, so Gary said, “Take my word for it.”

“When are we going on this great adventure?” Ron asked.

“We’ll leave at 3pm tomorrow,” Derek advised.

“Tomorrow is Sunday,” Ron said.

“Right,” Derek said, “Can you think of a better time to infiltrate than on a Sunday even-

ing?"

03Apr05...

About 9am, Gary came dragging 3 of the MP5's and a bag of loaded mags to the OP. They couldn't appear to be armed, he said, so maybe these popguns would come in handy.

"Does this café stay open all night?" Clarence asked.

"They close...at...10pm," Gary said, "Crap."

"What's plan B?" Ron asked.

"Plan A was unlikely Ron," Clarence said, "Why would that café be open with all that's going on?"

"Well, there's a 24-hour gas station right there at the exit," Gary said.

"They're sure to be open," Ron said sarcastically, "With all traffic to Vegas."

"I don't know about you guys," Ron said, "But I'm taking my Springfield; to hell with these popguns. We're going to end up in a ditch somewhere, just trying to keep warm."

"Only if they put in ditches since the last time I was there," Gary dryly observed.

o

The 51 people squeezed into 2 2½-ton trucks around 2:45pm and departed for Barstow. Derek had travel orders in his left shirt pocket, the infiltration orders in his right shirt pocket and requisition forms in his jacket pocket. Damon was driving the second truck and had copies of the same sets of orders. Damon had gotten confused about all the different sets of orders and just clipped them all on a clipboard, like he used to do when he drove truck. It took them about 2½ hours to get to Victorville and up I-15 to Barstow. North of Barstow, at the Ft. Irwin exit, everything was closed up tight. It didn't look like there were any lights on at Ft. Irwin either. They broke into the gas station to give Ron, Gary and Clarence someplace to stay and the others set out to infiltrate the Fort. Less than two hours later, a convoy pulled up in front of the gas station. There were 4 Hummers and 3 5-ton trucks in addition to the 2 2½ -ton trucks. The 5-ton trucks were loaded to the gills with munitions and the deuce and a half's half loaded with other supplies and the squads.

There wasn't any obvious explanation, but it seemed that Ft. Irwin was deserted. They'd been lucky to find anything. They made it back to the trailer park without encountering a single roadblock, too. It was as if the Army and CNG had just disappeared. They unloaded their haul and decided to lay low for a day or two, something big was brewing,

and everyone could sense it.

04Apr05...

"I don't like it, not one by God bit," Ron said.

"*In Harm's Way*, 1965, Otto Preminger, Admiral Broderick speaking to Commander Owynn," Gary said.

"I thought it was 1961," Ron replied.

Clarence was in the spirit of the moment and started to sing, "Where have all the soldiers gone, long time passing..."

"That's flowers, butthead," Ron said, "And who ever told you that you could sing?"

"Hell Ron, all us black people can sing," Clarence said.

"That was too easy," Gary said, "There should have been hundreds or thousands of troops at Ft. Irwin. I think we're in deep kimchi."

o

"Did we get the soldiers and Marines out of Ft. Irwin and 29 Palms?" Clark asked.

"Yes General they're all moving east, just like you ordered," the officer replied.

"What about that Colonel?" Clark asked, "The guard never reported back that he was dead."

"The guard and Colonel disappeared General," the officer replied, "We think they got on a helicopter for Ft. Benning."

"Can't anyone do anything right around here?" Clark bellowed. "I commanded thousands of troops in NATO and I never, never had problems like this."

"Yes you did, butthead," the officer thought, "You just couldn't or wouldn't see it."

"We're doing the best we can Sir," the officer replied.

"Well, your best isn't good enough, Mister," Clark bellowed again. "Dismissed."

Wesley Clark's half-baked plan was starting to unravel. The Colonel was right, he should have left those troops in Kosovo, Iraq and Korea, he admitted to himself. It was all Kerry's fault, he rationalized, "If he'd just picked me instead of John Edwards, I wouldn't have had to do it this way. I could have just put a contract out on Kerry and

stepped into the Presidency all nice and legal, just like Lyndon did.”

◦

“Something big is going on guys,” Derek said, “Get some scouts out tonight and get me some fresh Intel.”

“Are we looking for anything in particular?” Roy asked.

“Trying to locate the concentrations of the FEMA people, the CNG and the federal troops,” Derek replied.

The entire group was assembled in the Community Building at the trailer park. As far as equipment went, the 4 squads had as much as, or more than, they could use. Recruiting had completely dried up and it was just the 48 of them. Each squad would take either a Mk-19 equipped Hummer or a Ma Deuce equipped Hummer. The remainder of each squad would pile into the M1097A2 Humvee transports they’d ‘liberated’ from around the area.

That was, when they did another operation. The other militias all wore civilian clothing and to distinguish the Palmdale militia from the federal and CNG people, it had been decided to paint a peace symbol on the vehicles. It wasn’t large, and was crudely drawn to look like a bit of graffiti that someone hadn’t taken the time to clean off. All of their vehicles had the deep water fording kits installed. And, they had plenty of fuel for the vehicles, thanks to Damon. He had liberated several of the Flexcell fuel bladders.

They went out, in pairs, after dark, wearing civilian clothes and driving cars and pickups. Clark hadn’t rescinded martial law, but recently it didn’t seem to be enforced. The teams looked all night, but couldn’t find a single FEMA employee, CNG unit or any federal troops. It was almost as if they had dropped off the face of the earth. Derek was right, they concluded, something big was in the works, but what? The LEO’s had resumed their normal duties, just like nothing had happened. The whole thing stunk to high heaven.

05Apr05...

“Anyway, they’re all gone,” Derek was reporting to the three old geezers. “They just dropped off the face of the earth.”

“Bullcrap,” Ron said, “Get some long range radios, maybe some of the HF Ham units, and go looking for them. Report back when you find them. Unless Hummers can swim, they had to go east, so go east. And, watch your backsides, they’ll be concentrated into a large group or groups now. We’ll get together with Manny, Moe and Jack and give them a heads up.”

Preparations – Chapter 36 – Eastbound and Down

After Derek left, Gary lit into Ron.

“There you go again, acting like you were in charge,” Gary said.

“Well, it’s a tough job,” Ron said, “But somebody’s got to do it.”

“I heard that one before Ronald,” Gary said, “Get some new material.”

“Calm down you two,” Clarence said, “Where HAVE all the soldiers gone?”

“I’m just guessing,” Gary said, “But they probably headed east to the Midwest. They’re either going to Ft. Leonard Wood or to one of the posts in Texas, in my opinion.”

“Never heard of the place,” Ron said.

“It’s about 100 square miles in the Ozarks, Ron,” Gary said. “It’s a training post. It’s named after some Doctor who won the CMH.”

“My, aren’t we a bundle of information,” Ron observed.

“Up yours,” Gary snapped.

“Let’s say you’re right,” Ron continued, “What would they go there for?”

“It’s a Chemical weapons center, or, at least it used to be,” Gary explained.

“OP to TP-1,” Ron said over the CB.

“TP-1”

“Tell Junior to MOPP up and head for the big Show Me,” Ron said.

“10-4.”

“You’ve been spending too much time around Derek,” Gary observed. “That was as cryptic as the Bible code.”

“I think we ought to go along,” Ron said.

“I can’t make it Ron,” Gary said, straight faced, “My nurse doesn’t like to travel.”

“Might be able to find you a redhead named Daisy Mae in Missouri,” Ron suggested.

“It’s Stacy, but hell, in that case,” Gary smiled, “What are we waiting for?”

“Gary, the brains are above the nose, not below the chin,” Clarence instructed.

“I’m a leg man, Clarence,” Gary said.

“Yeah right,” the other two men echoed.

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06Apr05...

Ft. Leonard Wood is located in Pulaski County in south central Missouri along I-44. It looked to be a pretty straight shot, I-15 back to Barstow and I-40 to Oklahoma City where they would pick up I-44, assuming that Gary’s 1993 road atlas was still correct and they hadn’t renamed the roads or moved them. The trip was just under 1,300 miles to Oklahoma City, plus another 300, more or less to Springfield and then another 90 miles or so to the Fort. Hell, call it 1,700 miles for simplicity’s sake. At an average of 50mph, that was non-stop at 55mph and allowed for breaks to refuel and make pit stops, it was going to take them a day and a half to get there. Assuming, of course that they didn’t run into trouble along the way. Maybe Ft. Leonard Wood was the wrong destination entirely, but they had to start somewhere.

The other militias in the Antelope Valley were going to assemble their groups, locate additional transportation and follow as soon as they could. Manny knew leaders of several militia groups along the route to the Midwest and he would be contacting them and getting them to join in the foray. He told Derek that he’d have several thousand people with him by the time he arrived at Ft. Leonard Wood. Derek and his group could do all the recon work and they wouldn’t have to waste any time once he caught up. And as far as possible destinations went, one of his people had overheard a couple of CNG troops talking about Ft. Leonard Wood, so maybe they were right on the money.

They made Barstow with no trouble in about 3 hours. Needles next and it took about 4 hours for that leg. They stopped in Needles to refuel and make pit stops. They were not making good time; the trip from Barstow to Needles should have only taken 3 hours because it was only 144 miles. Their average speed was more like 36mph. The next stop was Williams and they would top off the tanks, do pit stops and change drivers. They covered those 178 miles in the same 4 hours; things were beginning to look up a little. They were just a half hour, give or take, out of Flagstaff. Our old friend Murphy was waiting for them when they hit the outskirts of Flagstaff. Apparently, the Army and/or guard units hadn’t been too nice to the folks in Flagstaff and the residents mistook them for more of the same dressed as they were in uniforms and driving military vehicles.

“Can we bypass Flagstaff?” Derek asked. “We don’t want any trouble with these people.”

“We’d have to back track to 89 and go south to Prescott, according to the map,” Gary

said. "Then we'd have to take 17 north to 260 and cut across to 87. 87 would take us into Winslow. Thing is, I don't know that 260 at all; it's probably blacktop, if I'm reading the map right."

"How much time is that going to cost us?" Derek asked.

"Not sure, maybe 2 or 3 hours, maybe longer," Gary said.

"We're not on a schedule here," Ron said, "Let's take the detour. However, before we leave, put these flags on those radio antennas."

"Where in the hell did you find a Don't Tread On Me Flag?" Gary asked.

"It's called a Gadsden Flag and I got them on the Internet a long time ago," Ron said. "Got a package deal, 6 for \$36. Anyway, no way that anyone is going to mistake us for regular Army if we're flying that flag."

They took a few minutes and mounted the flags. Then, they backtracked and took the detour. The time lost was 4 hours, but they had avoided trouble. Once they got back on I-40, they made a quick pit stop and proceeded on to Gallup. Once in Gallup, they topped off the tanks again, ate a meal and changed drivers again. Albuquerque was less than 140 miles and they hoped to make up a little time by driving right through and not stopping until they got to Tucumcari. It started to look like trouble in Albuquerque, too, but the Gadsden Flags must have told the residents something because they backed off and let them pass. They hadn't planned on stopping in Tucumcari, but everyone was totally exhausted. They figured they were about halfway to Ft. Leonard Wood and that maybe they'd better lay over and rest up.

08Apr05...

A schedule is a goal, not a taskmaster. They were way behind schedule but were rested up pretty good. The gal running the motel they pulled into gave them rooms for no charge when she saw the Gadsden Flags on their antennas. She had pinto beans, great northern beans or navy bean soup plus homemade bread in the restaurant. It was a shame that she only had 12 rooms in the motel instead of 48, wasn't it? The next stop was Amarillo.

They should be able to find out which way the troops headed in Amarillo. If they continued east, they were probably headed for Leonard Wood; southeast or south meant any one of several posts in Texas. When they arrived in Amarillo, they topped off, emptied out and ask around. The troops had gone east, they learned. They were going to go on to Oklahoma City and stay over for a night there; it wouldn't be any good for them to be tired being they were getting close to their destination.

09Apr05...

"I heard that we were going to start running into federal forces around Joplin," Roy said.

"Maybe we should cut off I-44 at the 301 exit and take Highway 60," Derek suggested.

"You sound like you know the country around here," Roy said.

"I do," Derek explained. "I went to college in a small town north of Springfield named Bolivar. I worked in Branson for a while, too. My oldest son, Derek, lives in Bolivar with his grandparents."

"How old is he?" Roy asked.

"Eleven," Derek replied. "I sort of figured on picking him up on the way back to California after we take out Ft. Leonard Wood."

"Assuming we take them out rather than the other way around, huh?" Roy said.

"That's why I said after, Roy," Derek responded coolly. "If they take us out, it won't make much difference."

They drove to the second US 60 exit, at the 301-mile marker, and took 60 over to Neosho. At Neosho, Derek lead them on a backwoods maze of roads, avoiding Springfield altogether. They ended up in Mansfield where they crossed US 60. Derek planned to take state route 5 to state route 38 and then cut east to state route 17. That would put them in Indian country. They would hole up in a small town called Roby for the night; Derek had kinfolk in the area. He had a bunch more to the northwest, too, in a small town named Cole Camp. Yes sir, Derek was right at home here in the heart of water moccasin and tick country. Damon was too, sort of. Maybe that's why he favored a short-barreled shotgun. Damon didn't like snakes. Derek was more concerned with the copperheads, the things didn't rattle to warn you. Well, that's not exactly true; they shook their tail, but had no rattles.

10Apr05...

"Listen up people," Derek said, "We're leaving our vehicles here at my aunt's farm and going the rest of the way on foot. Our mission is recon, so avoid contact with the Army at all cost. I'm leaving the three old geezers behind. They can keep an eye on the vehicles and serve as a coordination center for the Intel. This is a big fort; it covers almost 100 square miles. Roy, you take your team around the west side and to the north. That's where the main gate is, and use channel one. Becky you take your folks with Roy and cover the west side on channel two. Doc, you cover the south side on channel three and I'll cover the east side on channel four. Yes Damon, what do you want?"

"Can I switch to Doc's squad?" Damon asked.

"You're with me," Derek said, "You can walk off some of your pot gut."

“Sheesh.”

“Take enough rations for 7 days,” Derek continued. “And watch out for the copperheads, they don’t warn before they strike. Any questions?”

Gary raised his hand.

“Dad, question?” Derek asked.

“Why can’t we go with you?” Gary asked.

“You’re welcome to come along, it’s only about 15 miles to our AO,” Derek said.

“Miles?” Gary said, “Never mind.”

After everyone had left, Gary leaned over to Ron.

“Hey partner, where’s Daisy Mae?” he asked.

“In the newspaper,” Ron winked at Clarence.

“No, not the blonde, the redhead,” Gary protested.

“You wouldn’t have come if I said she was a blonde would you?” Ron asked.

“Hell no,” Gary said.

“So, I lied and said she was a redhead. So shoot me,” Ron laughed.

Gary grabbed for his M1A rifle.

“Whoa, partner, I was kidding about the shoot me part,” Ron said.

“I was too,” Gary said, “But it ain’t me with smelly drawers. Phew, you stink.”

“Uh, Gary what’s a copperhead look like?” Clarence asked looking behind Gary with his eyebrows raised.

Anyone ever seen a bottle rocket take off? Old Gar-Bear jumped several feet.

“Gotcha,” Clarence laughed.